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GLOBAL NEWS

THE ENERGY DRINK SHAKE-UP



The energy drink industry, once synonymous with high-octane, sugary beverages is undergoing a seismic shift driven by evolving consumer preferences. Red Bull and Monster Beverage Corp., the sector's pioneers, are now facing stiff competition as health-conscious consumers opt for sugar-free, nutrient-rich alternatives like Celsius. This trend, sparked during the pandemic, highlights the growing influence of wellness on purchasing decisions.

This shift is a wake-up call for legacy brands. Red Bull's association with extreme sports and nightlife carved a niche that resonated for decades, but today's consumers demand more than adrenaline-fueled branding. The rise of Celsius, bolstered by social media fitness influencers, exemplifies the power of tapping into the wellness narrative. By positioning their drinks as "better for you" with vitamin-enriched formulas, Celsius has attracted a broader, previously untapped audience.

The challenge lies in adapting their marketing strategies for Red Bull and Monster. Their sugar-free offerings, previously targeted at calorie-conscious men, need repositioning to appeal to the wider health-focused demographic. This shift also underscores the importance of leveraging digital platforms to engage with younger, wellness-driven consumers. The energy drink race is no longer about speed; it's about aligning with lifestyle trends. Brands that evolve their messaging to reflect this shift will lead the charge.



Digi-Buzz

MONDELEZ'S AI MAKEOVER FOR TIMELESS TREATS

At Mondelez International, Artificial Intelligence is making waves in the way our favorite snacks are crafted, blending technological precision with culinary artistry. Known for iconic treats like Oreos and Chips Ahoy, the company is deploying an AI-driven recipe development tool that streamlines product creation, optimizes ingredient use, and preserves each snack's true flavor.

Mondelez's AI tool was developed in partnership with Thought Works, evolving since 2019 into a robust system for creating and refining recipes. It analyzes key elements such as flavor intensity (buttery or vanilla), aroma (oily or burnt), and appearance (chip edges or roundness), while also factoring in cost, nutritional profile, and environmental impact. This data-driven approach accelerates product iteration; new recipes are reaching production trials four to five times faster than before.

However, this isn't a story of machines overtaking the kitchen. Mondelez emphasizes the irreplaceable role of human touch. Mondelez's AI tailors recipes to specific taste profiles, demonstrating consumer behavior analysis in action. By focusing on preferences like vanilla intensity or buttery richness, the company delivers products that resonate with target audiences. Early AI missteps, like recommending baking soda-heavy recipes, highlight the importance of this balance.

CEO Dirk Van de Put's commitment to consistent brand innovation has strengthened Mondelez's market efficiency, with 5.4% organic sales growth in the latest quarter. Using AI for faster innovation reflects a differentiation strategy, helping the company stand out in a saturated market. Yet, the company respects the delicate line between innovation and familiarity, avoiding drastic changes that might alienate loyal consumers.

As AI becomes integral to the creation of iconic snacks, Mondelez ensures that even as the methods evolve, the beloved flavors of treats like Oreo remain timeless.

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GOVT NEWS

**SUPREME COURT TO HEAR CCI'S
PLEA ON E-TAILERS TODAY**



The Supreme Court (SC) is set to hear the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) plea to consolidate 24 writ petitions filed by online sellers associated with Amazon and Flipkart. These petitions, lodged in various high courts, challenge CCI's investigation into alleged anti-competitive practices by the e-commerce giants. The sellers claim their status changed unfairly from being "third parties" to "opposite parties" without prior notice during the probe.

The CCI argues that the scattered cases are delaying proceedings and risking conflicting judgments. An SC decision to combine these cases could expedite the investigation, which began four years ago.

In marketing, fair competition ensures that businesses, regardless of size, compete on a level playing field. It fosters innovation, improves consumer choices, and prevents monopolistic behavior that could stifle smaller players.

This case highlights the importance of fair competition in the e-commerce market. Allegations against Amazon and Flipkart center on whether their practices have limited opportunities for smaller sellers and reduced market fairness.

If CCI's investigation progresses smoothly, it could set a precedent for ensuring competitive practices. For brands and sellers, fair competition isn't just about compliance—it's about trust. Consumers today are drawn to ethical businesses, and ensuring a fair marketplace is key to long-term success. The resolution of this case will have ripple effects on how e-commerce platforms and sellers engage with their markets.

What's at stake? For small sellers, it's about survival and fair access. For large platforms, it's about maintaining credibility and ensuring compliance with competition laws.



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INDUSTRIAL TREND

MAHINDRA AND TATA BATTLE FOR SUV SUPREMACY

Mahindra & Mahindra has surged ahead in India's competitive SUV market, challenging Tata Motors' earlier dominance. Its popular SUVs like the Thar Roxx, with over 1.7 lakh bookings, and the XUV700, known for premium features, have driven growth. In contrast, Tata's refreshed Nexon has failed to meet expectations, and its coupe-style Curvv EV is struggling to attract buyers. Experts suggest Indian consumers aren't ready for such niche designs yet. Meanwhile, Tata faces challenges due to aging models and a lack of significant launches until mid-2025, when the Sierra EV is expected to debut.

Mahindra's recent successes stem from a strong product strategy and an understanding of consumer demand. SUVs dominate 65% of India's passenger vehicle market, and Mahindra capitalized with fresh launches and advanced technology. Its market share increased from 10% in January to 13.14 percent in November. Mahindra's plan includes nine new ICE SUVs and seven EVs by 2030, ensuring a robust pipeline to maintain momentum.

Mahindra's focus on differentiation and market segmentation aligns with its dominance. By prioritizing premium features and targeting top-end buyers, it captures a growing demand for advanced SUVs. Meanwhile, Tata's struggles highlight the importance of product lifecycle management and regular refreshes to sustain market share.

This rivalry underscores how product innovation and timing are critical in shaping brand fortunes in a competitive market.



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Brand in Talk

TRADEMARK TUSSLE: INDIGO VS. MAHINDRA

IndiGo, India's largest airline, has sued Mahindra Electric Automobile Ltd. for trademark infringement for using the word "6E" on its upcoming BE6E electric SUV. IndiGo alleges that "6E" is critical to its branding as a sign of services such as 6E Prime and 6E Flex, and that Mahindra's use of the term violates its intellectual property. The two brands differ significantly stylistically and industry-wise, according to Mahindra. However, legal experts suggest that the overlap in transport-related categories may weaken Mahindra's defense. The case raises critical questions about how trademark laws apply across industries, especially when brand identity is at stake.

This dispute highlights the importance of brand identity as a cornerstone of differentiation. IndiGo's "6E" has become synonymous with its customer-centric services, reinforcing its competitive edge. The clash also emphasizes the principle of perceived proximity in branding; even though the industries differ, the shared focus on transport blurs boundaries, leading to potential consumer confusion.

Moreover, Mahindra's branding strategy demonstrates the risks of brand extension without thorough trademark due diligence. For marketers, this case underscores the need to protect intellectual property and ensure clear, distinct brand positioning when operating in increasingly interconnected markets.

This highlights the critical role of safeguarding intellectual property to maintain brand equity and avoid dilution. As industries converge, marketers must prioritize distinct branding to navigate an increasingly competitive landscape.

ECONOMIC DECLASSIFIED

CHANGING FUTURE OF FMCG FROM CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITIES



As we step into 2024, the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector in India finds itself at a critical juncture. With rising inflation, changing consumer preferences, and economic uncertainties, how equipped are FMCG brands to navigate this complex landscape and still deliver exceptional value to consumers?

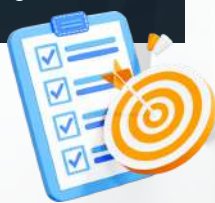
In today's rapidly evolving market, the urban middle class traditionally robust demand driver is feeling the financial pinch. Ongoing inflation and subdued job growth are squeezing disposable incomes, pushing consumers to rethink their spending habits. Industry experts describe this as a K-shaped recovery, where different segments of the economy recover at drastically different rates, creating an unequal trajectory. The affluent segment continues to thrive, while the lower middle class, heavily impacted by cost-of-living increases, struggles to keep pace.

But here's the opportunity: FMCG brands have the chance to innovate and realign their strategies to these shifting dynamics. While many companies experience margin pressures, the sector can leverage consumer insights and technology to drive personalized, value-driven engagement.

Emerging trends, such as the rising popularity of direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands and an evolving inclination towards experiences over products, necessitate a more agile and consumer-centric approach.

Moreover, with India's GDP growth showing a deceleration to 5.4%, the lowest in seven quarters, the onus is on brands to not only cater to affluent segments through premiumization but also to uplift and empower the lower middle class with affordable, high-quality offerings. This dual strategy could foster a more inclusive economic growth trajectory, balancing immediate gains with long-term sustainability.

FMCG companies must embrace these challenges with forward-thinking tactics that prioritize consumer empowerment and equitable value. By harnessing data analytics, fostering interactive experiences, and aligning with value-driven strategies, the sector can not only survive but thrive, enhancing the consumer experience across the spectrum. Are FMCG giants ready to innovate and champion the consumer through 2024's hurdles? The answer could redefine the future of India's consumer goods landscape.





SWOT Analysis



STRENGTHS

- **Diverse Product Range:** Vishal Mega Mart offers a wide range of products, including apparel, groceries, home essentials, and more, catering to various consumer needs.
- **Affordable Pricing:** The store is known for its affordable and competitive pricing strategy, which appeals to a large segment of cost-conscious consumers.
- **Large Network and Reach:** With numerous outlets across India, Vishal Mega Mart has a strong presence in both urban and semi-urban areas, enhancing its accessibility and convenience to a wide customer base.

WEAKNESS

- **Limited Online Presence:** Compared to its competitors, Vishal Mega Mart's online presence is relatively underdeveloped, limiting its ability to tap into the growing e-commerce market.
- **Operational Challenges:** The company has faced various operational challenges in the past, including supply chain inefficiencies and inventory management issues.
- **Reliance on Price-Based Competition:** Heavy reliance on competitive pricing could potentially erode profit margins, particularly in a highly price-sensitive market.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Expansion into New Markets:** There is significant potential for growth by expanding into untapped rural markets where the demand for affordable retail solutions is rising.
- **E-commerce Growth:** Capitalizing on the growing trend of online shopping by enhancing its digital and e-commerce capabilities can significantly boost sales and market presence.
- **Private label brands:** Developing and promoting private label brands could offer higher margins and strengthen brand loyalty among consumers.

THREATS

- **Intense Competition:** The retail sector is highly competitive with strong players like Big Bazaar and D-Mart and online platforms like Amazon and Flipkart, which pose a constant threat to market share.
- **Economic Downturns:** Adverse economic conditions and fluctuations in consumer spending can negatively impact sales and profitability.
- **Regulatory Changes:** Changes in retail regulations and policies could pose challenges to the operational and fiscal environment.

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BLOG OF THE MONTH

THE RISE OF FOUNDER-LED
MARKETING IN INDIA

**zomato**

In today's digital world, creating a strong brand takes more than just a great product or service. You need to connect with your audience, build trust, and create a loyal community of customers. But what are the founders in India doing for this?

In recent years, India has witnessed a significant shift in the way businesses approach marketing. Today, many business owners in India are taking a more personal approach to promoting their products and services. This approach, known as founder-led marketing, involves business owners becoming the face of their brand and promoting their products through personal branding and self-promotion.

Founder-led marketing has become increasingly popular among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups in India. By being the face of their brand, business owners can convey their passion, vision, and values more authentically. This promotes customer trust and credibility. Personal branding and self-promotion can also be a cost-effective way to reach customers, especially for small businesses with limited marketing budgets.

Do you think this really works?

Well, several Indian business owners have successfully adopted founder-led marketing. Aman Gupta, the co-founder of Boat, is a great example. Gupta is extremely active on social media, often sharing his thoughts on entrepreneurship, innovation, and the latest trends in the consumer electronics industry. His brand has helped build trust and credibility with Boat's target audience. Similarly, do you remember Zomato's Deepinder Goyal video going viral, who went undercover as a delivery partner in a mall? This helped him engage with the audience. This move has sparked a conversation about the importance of empathy and understanding in business leadership. Also, some founders are coming forward and sharing their stories through podcasts, which in turn is helping them to connect with people; this brings a sense of belonging to people listening to it.

In conclusion, founder-led marketing is an effective strategy for Indian entrepreneurs seeking to establish a strong brand presence. By leveraging personal branding and self-promotion, business owners can build trust, create loyalty, and drive business growth. As the Indian startup ecosystem continues to evolve, it will be interesting to observe how founder-led marketing strategies adapt and thrive.

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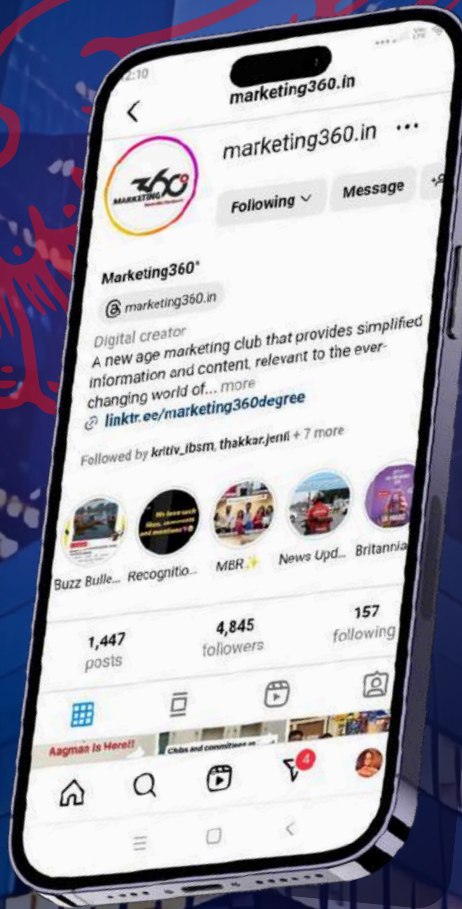
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