

# Saving Lives Through Lifebuoy's "Help a Child Reach 5" Social Marketing Campaign

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## Chapter Overview

"Saving Lives through Lifebuoy's 'Help a Child Reach 5' Campaign" describes the launch and effect of this campaign. It discusses a social marketing initiative by Hindustan Unilever conceived to fight the grave issue of child. They identified a cost-effective way to deal with the problem through the simple task of hand washing. The company partnered with several global bodies as well as village communities to achieve its goal. The campaign model was structured to benefit Lifebuoy through building an image of a socially conscious brand, as well strengthening its positioning of health soap, while ensuring the healthy lives of millions of people. First, the case focuses on the reasons which prompted the company to launch this initiative and further to create, promote, and manage a brand over time. Second, the case focuses on the barriers and competitions that the company had to face to achieve its objectives. The case further examines the outcome of the campaign and the lessons learnt.

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This case has been prepared with the help of published sources and does not portray the viewpoint of Hindustan Unilever Limited. The case is not designed to demonstrate either correct or incorrect handling of managerial problems.

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## Campaign Background and Environment

Lifebuoy soap was launched in the year 1895 with the goal to prevent cholera in the Victorian England. It has been working toward better health and hygiene across several countries. Marketed as a health soap brand, Lifebuoy, along with its partners, ran several hygiene-related promotional social initiatives. It had impacted the lives of nearly 183 million people in 16 countries (Unilever, 2014). The vision was “to make 5 billion people across the world, feel safe and secure by meeting the personal care hygiene and health needs” through their hand washing programs (HUL Brand Lifebuoy, n.d.). This social marketing vision was integrated in the commercial marketing strategies of the Lifebuoy business. The message of protection from germs and hygiene education was carried by all their communication and innovation activities like: product development, advertising, point of sale, and consumer activations. The mission was to ensure behavioral and attitudinal change of the target audience, which in turn would benefit them as well as the society in which they live (Andreasen, 1994). Based on the understanding of behavioral science, Lifebuoy had developed a 5-point model, as explained below, to achieve its mission (Unilever, n.d.).

1. Make it understood. The first step was to create awareness and acceptance about the necessity of hand washing with soap using evidence that only water is not enough.
2. Make it easy. The second step was to create convenience to do what is right and feel confident about the same.
3. Make it desirable. The third step was to fit the new behavior with self and society.
4. Make it rewarding. The fourth step was about the reward for the behavior, which includes the payoff.
5. Make it habit. This was the final step which was about the continuity of the activity through reinforcements and reminders.

This model was developed around the “Theory of Planned Behavior” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011) where individuals made cognitive decisions to engage in behaviors by processing and analyzing the information available to them. Here, the outcome was determined by the individual’s perception about the value it added and the ease with which it could be performed. The Lifebuoy model works toward providing mechanisms to evaluate information and to facilitate the ease of hand washing behavior by projecting the value this behavior can add to their mundane lives. The goal was to bring about a social transformation in villages through hand washing with soap by identifying and mobilizing relevant influencers like mothers, teachers, and community leaders.

A large number of people, especially in rural India, lacked access to proper sanitation and safe drinking water which led to bad hygiene practices. India had the highest number (380,000) of annual child (<5 years) deaths occurring due to diarrhea. It translated to nearly 1000 deaths per day (Unilever, n.d.). Tackling this problem was critical to reduce mortality from diseases originating from poor hygiene habits. Hand washing with soap before meals (11%) and after defecation (1%) by mothers in India

was extremely low (APAC Effie Awards & Tenasia Group Pvt. Ltd., 2015). Hindustan Unilever (HUL) over the years, through its brands Lifebuoy, Pureit, and Domex has addressed a lot of hygiene issues prevailing in India.

The WHO (2017) report revealed that diarrhea was one of the major causes of death among children under five years of age. India accounted for 21% of the under five child mortality rate. One of the ways to reduce these deaths was following a regular hand washing habit with soap which also proved to be a cost-effective mechanism. The goal of Lifebuoy through its various initiatives was to increase awareness and change attitude toward hand washing with soap, ultimately leading to a lifesaving behavioral transformation.

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## **"Help a Child Reach 5" Campaign**

In partnership with Tropical Medicine and International Health (United Kingdom), HUL conducted an intervention experiment with 70 low-income communities in Mumbai (India) for 41 weeks. Households with children around 5 years studying in a municipal school were selected. They were provided free Lifebuoy soap along with other marketing activities to create awareness, educate, motivate, and reward. Enlisting the support of mothers through "Good Mums Club," meetings, and reminder wall hangings, as well as small gifts like toys and coins were also used as a part of the behavioral change principles (Claessen, Bates, Sherlock, Seeparsand, & Wright, 2008). The results showed 25.3% reduction in diarrhea in case of 5-year-olds and 30.7% for whole families (Nicholson et al., 2014). Encouraged by these findings, Lifebuoy formalized its hand washing program and launched the first "Help a Child Reach 5" initiative. These findings motivated them to also think about public-private partnerships to achieve their goal of reduction in child mortality.

Lifebuoy had launched its new campaign in India called "Help a Child Reach 5" in the year 2012. The campaign was launched in the Indian village of Thesgora, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, which had the highest rate of child diarrhea. In partnership with global bodies (USAID,<sup>1</sup> WSUP,<sup>2</sup> and PSI<sup>3</sup>) and non-government organizations at the village community level, the company attempted to take this campaign to the remote districts of India. The company engaged their employees and trained professionals to visit homes, health centers, and schools to create awareness regarding proper hand washing. Lifebuoy had designed a unique social campaign to generate awareness about how the simple task of hand washing could help save several lives every year. Reaching the age of five for a child in some parts of India was difficult due to diseases like diarrhea. An emotional real-life story advertisement and later a video of the same were aired on television as well as YouTube. The response to this video encouraged the company to extend this

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<sup>1</sup>United States Agency for International Development.

<sup>2</sup>Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor.

<sup>3</sup>Population Service International.

campaign to the other villages in India. Along with the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and Bihar State Government India, the next phase was launched in the year 2013. It also included new mothers and midwives as their target market by giving them visit at home and at health care centers to create awareness and encourage hand washing with soap (Unilever, n.d.). Moreover, they also carried out several other activities in other states of India to promote the hand washing habit.

Lifebuoy adopted communication mediums like television, mobile, and digital platforms over direct contact to penetrate faster. These platforms were interactive with respect to sharing stories and experiences by consumers, which in due course proved to be meaningful and far reaching (Unilever, n.d.).

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## **SWOT Analysis**

### **Strengths**

- This campaign was based on clinical research data.
- The village where this initiative was operating showed reduced child mortality.
- Managed to create awareness about hand washing among mothers and children.
- Sensitized urban population toward rural health problems.
- The red color of Lifebuoy soap had a strong brand association.
- The carbolic smell was strongly linked to Lifebuoy soap.
- Lifebuoy soap was associated with hygiene and germ protection since its inception.
- Lifebuoy had extensive distribution ranging to more than 5 million outlets.

### **Weaknesses**

- India being a large country makes it difficult to cover all regions.
- Public-private partnership has operational limitations.
- The initial positioning was as a masculine brand.
- Hygiene positioning made competing on the beauty platform challenging.
- Appeal was more rural than urban.

### **Opportunities**

- Ample opportunity to associate the brand with social initiatives.
- Prospect of partnering with government and other non-profit organizations.
- Global associations could be further leveraged to strengthen the brand image.

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## Threats

- Hygiene platform was getting crowded with other competitor brands.
- Other competitors were introducing similar social campaigns.
- Balancing between hygiene low-priced versus beauty high-end soaps was tough.

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## Target Audience

Lifebuoy's "Help a Child Reach 5" was a campaign under the overall global initiative of sustainable living. This campaign included all stakeholders as their target audience including residents of the village, rural school authorities and teachers, and local health community members. HUL employees who were involved in the initiative formed an important part of the target audience.

Parents were considered to be the target as they could identify with loss of child and in turn help to spread the message. Mothers were their prime target as they were identified as key agents of change both at home and school. The fathers' involvement was sought through community activities (Unilever, n.d.). They also actively included new mothers as the first 28 days were critical for survival of the infant. Another crucial target audience was school teachers without whose support this activity could not be carried out. Involvement of local representatives was also sought to leverage the collective effort toward social change. Their secondary audience was the general public in India. Everyone involved was required to reinforce hand washing activity at critical points like before eating, after defecating, playing, working in the fields, etc.

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## Campaign Objectives

Lifebuoy brands global objective was to bring about a transformation in the hygiene behavior of one billion consumers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (APAC Effie Awards & Tenasia Group Pvt. Ltd., 2015). There were three main objectives of this campaign: creating awareness, influencing attitude, and changing behavior. This was to strengthen the image of being a socially concerned brand.

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## Creating Awareness

Several activities were undertaken to create awareness about hand washing and its impact on child mortality. This was done at two levels, first with the rural population who were directly affected by lack of this habit and second with the urban

population to sensitize them toward the problem of child deaths due to avoidable diseases. Different modes of communication were used to create awareness. They leveraged the power and penetration of social media by making emotional appeals through video clips on YouTube to involve the urban Indian population to make these invisible deaths visible. They requested the people to make a pledge on Facebook and Twitter to ensure that every child celebrates their fifth birthday.

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## **Influencing Attitude**

The next step was to influence the attitude toward hand washing itself and share this message. The influencers in case of children were the teachers and parents, while in case of new mothers, it was the doctors and midwives. They were approached with repetitive messages about hand washing evidence materials and reminders.

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## **Changing Behavior**

This was the ultimate objective of the company for which all the stakeholders had to be targeted. Their main objective was to drive hand washing behavior and make it a permanent habit. Different campaign activities were focused on one single problem “not washing hands at critical times.” HUL employees were assigned to schools and villages in remote parts of India to educate about hand washing habits. Songs that would attract and remind children were used to inculcate the hand washing behavior. The objective was to present the solution in a manner that would lead to a lasting behavioral change.

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## **Barriers, Benefits, and Competition**

The main hurdle that faced the target audience was the attitude and in turn the behavior toward hand washing with soap. It was ignorance and indifference toward this habit and this rigid mentality which was Lifebuoy's toughest competitor. Further, only 1% of the people in rural India were found to wash hands regularly before eating and after defecating despite having access to soap (HUL, 2012). Availability of running water and basic infrastructure at schools was another obstacle ahead of the company.

The main benefit was reduction in mortality arising from these diseases for children as well as neonatal. The child remained healthier which in turn led to less days lost at school. The household members benefited economically, mentally, and socially. The habit could further benefit the community when the evidence was visible and would lead to proper hand washing habits for even adults.

In rural India, soap was often replaced with ash which was easily available from their cooking stove (coal/wood) for washing hands and utensils. At times simple wiping of hands on clothes was considered an option instead of washing with soap. All these methods were faster, cheaper, and easily available options that prevented use of soap for hand washing. This was also a result of lack of education and awareness that what appears clean is not always so.

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## Positioning

Initially, Lifebuoy had very little competition when it was first introduced in India in the year 1895. Since 1933, it was positioned as a hygiene and germ protection hand and body wash soap. It maintained this position in the mind of the consumers for decades. Its catchy advertisement and jingle in the Hindi language was clearly communicating this first on the radio and then with visuals on television.

After independence, the red soap in a red, rough wrapper started losing its appeal in the urban markets with competing brands being positioned on the beauty platform. Over the years, Lifebuoy, after several product line extensions and packaging modifications, had variants for both rural and urban consumers. However, it retained the hygiene and germ protection arena in the soap market. In order to achieve this objective, the brand had followed the global positioning strategy and had launched several campaigns in India to support the brand communication.

Social campaigns by other competing soap companies addressing the need for hand washing with soap were initiated by Dettol Soap in the year 2015 which was the closest competitor to Lifebuoy in the Indian market. The brand was competing with Lifebuoy on the health positioning and in the year 2015, it launched a social marketing campaign called "Dettol Banega Swachh India." They had partnered with Media Company NDTV and Facebook for this campaign along with endorsement by Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, the well-known Indian celebrity. The objective of this campaign was to address the hygiene and sanitation needs in India (Dettol, n.d.). One part of their campaign was a "School Hand Wash Program" and "Young Mothers Program." The other part was toward improving sanitation facilities. Their main target was the pilgrimage city of Varanasi and the religious fairs at Rishikesh and Ujjain in India. They undertook installation of incinerators, sanitary-pad disposal machines, mirrors, exhaust fans, and soaps for hand washing in one of the girls' schools in Varanasi. The fair sites had volunteers providing water sprayers and sanitizers at critical locations like food stalls, bathing areas, and toilets to ensure proper hand washing (The Economic Times, 2016a). They also planned to build sanitation facilities in two other states of India—Maharashtra and Bihar. They had enrolled the support of 500 village community leaders, 500 natural and faith-based leaders, 500 accredited social health activists, child care workers, and mothers for this initiative (The Economic Times, 2016b). To involve children and turn them into spokespersons at home, a series of modules and game toolkits were created to educate them about regular hygiene practices. The goal was to carry

this message to first, second, and third grade students every year through 15 sessions. They had made a few schools to incorporate an e-curriculum for the same purpose (The Economic Times, 2016c).

Another close competitor brand to Lifebuoy was Savlon brand, owned by Johnson & Johnson, which had launched the campaign “Savlon Swasth India Mission” in the year 2016. Under this initiative, the brand had carried out interactive programs for adults and children through storytelling and visual engagement to create awareness about hygiene practices. Training about water, sanitation, and hygiene practices were imparted to students and teachers. In order to motivate the students, they themselves were made responsible to ensure that healthy habits were observed by forming student representative committees (ET Brand Equity, 2016).

A school engagement program was launched for students to discover the motivation to hand wash with soap at lunch breaks and created chalk sticks which doubled up as soap when hands were washed with water. Since rural Indians were using slate and chalk for school work, it was decided to distribute it to several schools across the country. The goal was to distribute and to reach around 1 million children across 2000 schools (Law, 2017). The objective behind this campaign was to bring about behavioral change toward hand washing with soap.

The latest activity in furtherance of the same program had been initiated in three metro cities in India—Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata. This initiative created awareness about the necessity of cleaning hands for street food vendors. Consumers were encouraged to ring a bell which was placed at some stalls to remind the vendor to wash hands before touching the food. Besides placing the bell, free Savlon sachets were provided to the vendor (CSR Vision, n.d.).

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## **Campaign Strategies**

### **Product Strategies**

The red Lifebuoy logo was used to run many social marketing campaigns in India. “Help a Child Reach 5” was one such campaign linked to this brand. The visual of the logo was used since it communicated the core value of cleanliness and protection from germs to the rural population. The campaign was associated with the brand name Lifebuoy without specifying any product in particular. They had launched a small Rs. 5/- mini 18 g soap bar to make soap affordable for the low-income segment. This would last for 13 days for one person to wash their hands at critical times of the day.

### **Pricing Strategies**

Since several variants of the Lifebuoy were available at different price points, the campaign could attract a larger consumer base by associating itself with the whole

range of Lifebuoy soaps. The affordable soap bar could appeal to rural consumers while the other premium variants could appeal to the urban consumer base.

## **Place Strategies**

The campaign was initiated in the most affected village of Thesgora in central India in the year 2012. Later in the year, several other villages in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar were covered under this campaign. These states account for more than 50% of child deaths before the age of 5 years. At the ground level, Lifebuoy trained health promoters, who during the initial weeks visited rural primary schools in these villages to demonstrate proper hand washing techniques, made home visits, and visited health centers.

## **Promotion Strategies**

In order to ensure the success of the campaign, the company at the onset identified the villages that had to be targeted and other critical support partners. Those villages that had a high rate of child diarrhea were selected for this program. As for the partners, government, local bodies, and leaders were involved from the beginning for assistance. The implementation was carried out by an expert team along with local support to ensure better communication as well as understanding of ground reality (Unilever, n.d.).

Several activities were undertaken as a part of this campaign. A team of employees visited the villages along with trained health promoters. House visits were conducted to explain the importance of hand washing using pictorial guides. Mothers were given monitoring sheets to ensure that they washed hands before touching the new born baby. Government run child care centers and school teachers were educated about hand washing. Charts were given to children to record daily hand washing. School teachers were requested to promote hand washing habits in the class room. Wall danglers were placed at several places as a reminder for hand washing. Hand washing was made fun through a variety of activities like songs and games. Flipcharts and posters were placed at hand washing places. A novel fun hand water pump in the shape of a horse was created.

Besides that, advertisements and long-format digital films based on real-life stories were created and uploaded on YouTube, the Facebook brand page, and Web site. Anyone could share as well as donate to the cause. Lifebuoy donated Rs. 1/- for each share. The first long-format digital film was about "Gondappa" who walked on his hands to the deity when his child reached five years of age. The next film was about a lady who had lost her child and had affection toward a tree. The third film showed the unborn daughter of a pregnant women talking to her about hygiene practices. They also provided a link for Facebook and a hashtag for Twitter where people could go and pledge their support to the initiative.

A lifesaver volunteer program was started in the year 2014 to promote this campaign in the various cities. Initially, a hundred student volunteers from colleges were enrolled and trained. They were required to visit schools and also their own communities. As an extension of this, around 1000 Guide and Scout leaders in the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh were trained under the four-week global program called “School of 5” which made the mundane task of hand washing into fun-filled activities with games and rewards. The leadership skills of these children were used to impart education to their communities and further to at least 10 other children (WAGGGS, 2017).

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## Other Important Strategies

*Roti<sup>4</sup> Reminder:* Another innovative activity undertaken by Lifebuoy was stamping of its hand washing message onto millions of rotis at a large religious fair held in India. More than 100 restaurants and cafés were included as partners to help promote hand washing awareness. The rotis on top carried the message “Lifebuoy se haath dhoye kya?” which was meant to be a reminder to wash hands with Lifebuoy soap.

*Jump-Pumps:* Joining hands with the Government mid-day meal scheme in two states of India, Lifebuoy discovered the reason for inertia about hand washing: the old rusted hand pump was the only source of water at the schools. The Lifebuoy team replaced this with a crafted rocking horse using a simple mechanism.

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## Program Evaluation

Evaluating the impact of the campaign, the following facts could be observed:

- It generated awareness of the campaign leading to interest, as seen from the response to the videos on YouTube. More than 3.5 million views and 2 million likes along with several thousand pledges on Facebook and Twitter were recorded (Social Samosa, 2013).
- 356,093 children were reached as a result of sharing the film and Lifebuoy donating Rs. 1/- per share.
- They received 20 million rupees as a donation for this activity from global citizens.
- Results from a survey by Nielsen of 579 households in Thesgora that overall the health of the community had improved (Unilever, n.d.).
- Further based on mothers’ assessments, there was a reduction in occurrence of diarrhea from 36 to 5%.

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<sup>4</sup>Roti is an Indian flat bread.

- Higher percentages of mothers (33%) and children (26%) were using soap to wash hands.
- Nearly 600,000 children were educated about the importance of proper hand washing by the year 2015 (Unilever, n.d.).
- The results of this campaign in India had led to implementation of this program in other states of India and further to other countries across the world.
- During the second phase where the focus was on the neonatal period, the ad film received 14 million views and was the most viewed advertisement in the year 2015 (Unilever, n.d.).
- This initiative led to its adoption in other villages across 14 countries in Asia and Africa (APAC Effie Awards & Tenasia Group Pvt. Ltd., 2015).

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## Discussions and Lessons Learned

HUL had adopted its global strategy in case of Lifebuoy and had integrated its promotional approach with their sustainable living vision. Over the years, Lifebuoy had been creating awareness about the importance of hand washing through several campaigns in India. "Help a Child Reach 5" was another promotional activity that further associated Lifebuoy with its hygiene and germ-free platform. What began in a small village in India was now a campaign which had been scaled up to reach several other villages not just in India but in several countries across the world.

They identified a cost-effective and easy way to deal with a serious issue like child mortality through a simple task of hand washing. Hand washing message with soap at five critical times in a day was disseminated. Besides creating awareness about this, reminders about the same were ensured. This was done for at least 21 days as research indicated that 21–50 days were needed for behavior to become habit and eventually become permanent practice. They attempted to remove the barriers to hand washing with soap by using a variety of creative promotional tools like banners, posters, games, and ad-films to appeal to different target audiences. Lifebuoy had gained market acceptance as a socially trusted brand.

It was a planned and systematic approach by the company in connecting the problem with the solution and further adopting it to promote the brand. The first lesson was the significance of identifying the appropriate target audience, powerful influencers, and decision makers. They had identified the influencers and decision makers who needed to be engaged to achieve the positive results. The importance of implementing the campaign at ground level was another lesson. Moreover, it was not possible to achieve the objective unless the company joined hands with partners like the government of various states in India plus big and small non-government organizations. They also collaborated with celebrity spokespersons to help promote the program and leveraged an emotional connection with the consumers. The consistent message disseminated by the brand over the years and its association as a hygiene platform through several of its campaigns certainly led to a strong brand positioning.

### Discussion Questions

1. Evaluate the campaign in light of the objectives of the company.
2. Should this social marketing campaign be continued and extended? If yes, please justify and suggest suitable changes.
3. Do you think the promotional activities are effective for the given target audience?
4. Suggest if any other target audience could be approached by the company for better results?
5. What are the changes, if any, that you recommend in the message strategy keeping in mind the campaign objective and the overall marketing objective?

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