

Ramadan during coronavirus: Will cultural branding work now?

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By [Anirban Chaudhuri](#)

One of the key aspects of managing brands in a world that is multicultural is the emphasis on cultural branding. Identifying cultural opportunities in society and integrating that with the brand narrative has been practiced by businesses and brands to uphold their relevance in consumer's life. Joining in celebrations hence have become 'must do' in the [marketing](#) calendar of savvy practitioners.

In India we have seen a chocolate redefining the sweetmeat recipes during Durga Puja or our gifting portfolio getting savoury around Deepawali by the courtesy of snacking players. Brands have been thriving on a continuous cultural exchange in the markets they operate.

[Ramadan](#) brings up such an opportunity of building cultural relevance for brands every year. Every day of the month long cultural ritual creates opportunities for brands to either participate as a part of breaking the fast moment in the evening (fataor), the iftar feast or day long engagements to facilitate connections across friends and families and even at times the rituals. Some do come up with special campaigns to nudge their chances of being part of the Ramadan purchases.

However, this year appears to be so different because of the ongoing pandemic, which has put a stop to our freedom of venturing outdoors. With the world taking a pause, will cultural branding play a role for marketers this Ramadan?ely, it can. As brands increasingly claim their reason to be as a solution to human challenges, they adapt to changing scenarios and adopt fresh perspectives to continue to solve evolving challenges for their people. In a world under COVID19 attack, it is time for brands to RISE to the occasion of Ramadan. This RISE can act at four distinct areas of interventions that not only facilitates the religious rituals and augment celebratory spirit but can drive meaningful conversations, much needed to reinforce the social fabric of the nation.

R stands for Reducing Distances. Like any other religious observances, Ramadan too has practices of prayers and sermons at congregations. It is also a time where family and friends, near and far, find time to meet, pray and share meaningful times together. The lockdown obviously comes in between these customs, albeit for the greater good of fighting novel [coronavirus](#). The physical distances within families this year are also an outcome of members getting scattered across locations as the lockdown puts a pause on means of mass travel and keeping them stranded, away from home. However, in a world

otherwise connected through mobile phones and internet, there is a huge opportunity for brands and businesses to facilitate people coming together virtually. Leveraging [technology](#) to reduce the physical distance and build a sense of social togetherness can endear brands to the audience for making a much-needed contribution during these trying times.

[Ibadat](#) – the commandments for prayers. But it is not about mere show of devotion but a series of acts that help one to maintain a way of life aimed at purity and spirituality, without shirking one's obligatory duties. Technology again is playing a pivotal role in helping the followers keep up with tradition. In many countries, WhatsApp groups help the young learn Quran or Ramadan apps prod the households to follow traditional rituals during this month. Google Play Store too has an app called Ibadat-e-Ramadan with high ratings from users. What other way can brands partner the audience in their quest for ibadat using the benefits of technology?

Sadaqah. This Ramadan, there is no greater good that one can do but follow the path of voluntary charity. If Zakat is mandatory and based on a formula linked to income, Sadaqah is linked to the joy of giving. Any act of kindness, from a good deed that impacts others to financial support for someone's livelihood constitute Sadaqah. In times of turbulence like the one we all are experiencing, there are many who are suffering even for daily sustenance. Not just payment gateways, but creating platforms that can directly work for the needy on-ground using endowment from the followers is where brands can make a proactive mediation. Brand volunteerism is likely to see a global surge during this holy month.

Entertainment acts as a glue to keep the spirit up. Even during normal times, keeping up with the ensuing celebratory *chi* of *Eid-UI-Fitr*, special content has been a part of the month of Ramadan in many markets. In the Middle East, Arabic language television channels garner high audience ratings during the month of Ramadan after sunset as families bond over the meal at home. It is a great time for movies and special series.

Even in India, for years we have seen super hit movies that were released around *Eid-UI-Fitr*. [Bajrangi Bhaijaan](#) or *Sultan* in the recent past is a testimony for the same. Now with 1.4 billion Indians homebound who steadily are increasing their time with television sets and OTT – what could be the new set of content that can help Ramadan evening lighting up the family time? The production of the same need not follow the traditional approach and the lockdown has pushed any creative ways of developing quality content.

Times are different but if there is a will, RISE could be a way for businesses to build a connect with the audience within the paradigm of cultural branding.

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Views expressed are personal.***

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