

News monitored for: Pepsi - Brands



# The Family That Trains Together

Why did PepsiCo pack 40 families aboard a train across India? **By Ravi Balakrishnan**

**B**ack in 2007, PepsiCo's snack food brand Kurkure launched the Kurkure Express: a branded train connecting Bengaluru to Nagercoil, Hubli and Chennai. The trains displayed branding prominently and at the time, was an experiment by a cash-strapped railway system to acquire a fresh burst of income. It was a short-lived endeavour with reports quickly emerging that these specials would be discontinued because they confused passengers.

After seven years, the Kurkure Express is back in a different avatar. This time, PepsiCo has commissioned an entire train, right down to deciding the compartments and the itinerary—Delhi to Kolkata and back with major stops along the way in Mumbai and Chennai—as a part of summer promotion for its snack brand, Kurkure. AID Shivakumar, CEO, PepsiCo is willing to say about an effort that cannot have been the easiest thing to pull off, logistically speaking is "The work with the government and the railways is heartening; it shows this can be done."

The relaunched Kurkure Express is the latest salvo in a long running campaign pitching the ₹1000 crore plus brand as the ultimate family snack. Explaining the appeal of the product, Devendra Chawla, group president—food, FMCG, Future Group says, "While extruded snacks were available in India in the form of *murakku*, *ghatta*, etc, Kurkure with its technology of having rice meal and corn meal created a new form of snacking. With Pepsi's distribution strength, it created a mega brand in an otherwise very traditional local food category, hard to crack for an MNC."

Kurkure kicked into high gear in 2005 with actor Juhi Chawla as brand ambassador, and a campaign focused on an eccentric family. Chawla is long gone but the idea lives on, peopled by a gallery of famous faces including Parineeti Chopra, Kunal Kapoor and

Boman Irani. Previous promotions like 2007's Chai Time Achievers also featured regular families that supplied winning recipes on the packaging and one of them even made it to a TV commercial.

Of late, several brands have jumped aboard the bandwagon of technology being an alienating force, advising people to disconnect (ironically enough, often via several minute long online films). Via this campaign, PepsiCo's actually aims at getting families together: aboard a train, where they spend time together, sample copious amounts of Kurkure, interact with celebrities and play games. The families were selected via a contest where they put up photos or videos of themselves,

making a case for being part of the journey. 40 were chosen from across the country from a 1000 entries. Four of these will move on to a culinary tour of Europe.

The promotion was conceived by Partho Chakrabarti, COO—Foods, PepsiCo and Vani Gupta Dandia, marketing director—Indian snacks, foods. Says Shivakumar, "A train journey is about timelessness. And at the heart of Kurkure is the proposition of bringing families together." He admits it's also about activating an idea that feeds into social media, resulting in the brand trending on Twitter. The format allows Kurkure to display its range—currently over 150 variants including traditional namkeens—and serve up varieties inspired by the states the train passes through.

It's also a guard against the brand getting complacent. Shivakumar observes, "Complacency is one step away from extinction." It's something the brand needs to watch out for agrees Chawla: "The new millennial believes in authenticity and recently players like Haldiram and MTR sensing this, have upped distribution. Going forward, authenticity will be critical to capture more local tastes."

ravi.balakrishnan@timesgroup.com



**Kurkure Express is the latest salvo in a long running campaign pitching the brand as the ultimate family snack**