

## **Disruptive Mobility Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study on the Brand Development Strategies of Yulu**

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### **Abstract**

India is home to many technology-based startups in the global economy (Gai & Joffe, 2013) and is ranked as the 3rd largest startup ecosystem in the world (Indian Startup Ecosystem, 2022). Within India, Bangalore, the country's "Silicon Valley," was named one of the nine International Startup Hubs outside the United States (Pullen, 2013). Bengaluru is ranked 23rd in an annual analysis of the world's most hospitable startup environments (Business Standard, 2021) and in a silicon city such as Bengaluru, startups emerge, grow, and fall. Yulu is an urban micro-mobility startup that started in 2017 to solve the first and last mile connectivity problems and help the environment. This study intends to understand the various brand development strategies adopted by the mobility startup Yulu before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mixed methods adopted for the study attempts to analyze the social media engagement of the brand on Instagram and Facebook from 2018 to 2021. The results indicate that the key measures and steps taken by Yulu helped it to rise above the competition and evolve from merely a startup to a brand. The unprecedented pandemic posed challenges to all businesses, but Yulu found its way out through various strategies. Yulu was timely with their social awareness campaigns and content, allowing people to connect and react better. Yulu was also successful in exciting its users with rapid expansions in different zones of the city and across the country.

**Keywords:** Startup, Yulu, Brand Development Strategies, Integrated Marketing.

### **I. Introduction**

*"Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room." - Jeff Bezos.*

Building a brand is certainly a stage that would require planning. On the other hand, the active effort would lead to the formulation of long-term relationships with potential clients. This can lead to an increasing trend in leads and revenues, as well as referrals and word-of-mouth endorsements for the company's goods or services. The goal of brand development is to establish a recognisable and long-lasting image in the marketplace by utilising methods and promotions to increase consumer awareness about the company. A strong brand strategy is a must-have component for any successful brand. Brand development is also the process of creating and distinguishing a company's logo, products, and services from those of competitors. The development process includes aligning the brand with the business goals, communicating the brand to the target market, and upgrading or improving the brand as needed.

Customers demand brands to be however open, genuine, and true to their cause (Patni & Dev, 2021). Consumers monitor the brand activism practised by brands, and they support and value brands that advocate for the greater benefit of society.

Headquartered in Bengaluru, Yulu is a startup started in August 2017 with the vision of enabling first and last mile connectivity in a smooth, shared, and long-term manner, while also assisting in the reduction of traffic congestion and emissions. It is a technology-driven mobility platform that enables integrated urban mobility across public and private transportation modes. The Yulu platform is easy to use, reliable, and scalable, guided by three urban mobility principles: accessibility, availability, and affordability. Yulu's founders were inspired and motivated by a desire to alleviate Bangalore's traffic problems. It is the country's sole micro-mobility startup offering swappable battery options for electric vehicles. Using its unique and smart vehicles, the Yulu team has established a technology platform centered on micro-mobility and is harnessing technology to solve difficult urban mobility problems.

Yulu's key goal is to reduce urban traffic congestion and provide a safe mode of transportation. As a new concept of bicycle sharing in India, Yulu saw an opportunity to thrive. In an interview in May 2018, (8 months after Yulu was founded), Amit Gupta, Co-Founder and CEO of Yulu, said, "In India, bicycle sharing is a new concept, and the real impact is yet to be seen in the long run. In the case of Yulu, however, we chose a small area rather than deploying our services across the city. Now we're seeing behaviour shifts, with people who used to walk or use public transportation to get from work to home now opting to ride bicycles. " Yulu started with just a few sample bicycles in one area in Bengaluru.

This study will shed light on Yulu's brand development strategies that led it to become a success story.

## II. Review Of Literature

In recent years, the number of startups in India has been continually increasing, and more help is accessible in all areas. The Indian market provides several prospects for startups, new businesses, and young entrepreneurs, and startups, in turn, have high prospects for market expansion and job creation. As a result, support has risen in several areas, including office space and infrastructure, as well as business mentoring and networking. Market and user research are essential for startups. While mentors can teach them about the business, they will almost certainly still need to communicate with their customers to gain a deeper grasp of their demands (Korreck, 2019).

In a study that focused on the Make India Plan and its relation to startups in India and entrepreneur development (Chandiok, 2016), argues that in the context of a high rate of startup mortality, uncomplicated beginnings and endings are crucial. Sufficient funding for incubation centres can also prove to yield better results. To create an entrepreneurial climate in India, the government, large corporations, and educational institutions should all work together to foster a startup culture. Mentorship programs, innovative essay competitions, workshops, seminars, and conferences ought to be coordinated by the public authority and colleges.

A study on the factors of the ecosystem that impact the growth of high-tech start-ups in India empirically studies the role played by ecosystem-related factors in the rise, development, and growth of startup clusters in India. The study focuses on the fact that high economic growth

will not only help grow any startup, but it will also require constant efforts to tackle the challenges faced in the early stages of development (Joshi & Satyanarayana, 2014).

‘Why Do Startups Fail?’ - a case study based empirical study by (Kalyanasundaram, 2018) examines the reasons behind the failure of startups in India. Through the research, various factors of failure and success have been analyzed using four case studies as the foundation. Furthermore, the analysis of the case studies on various challenges faced by these startups have resulted in some inferences and key lessons. The majority of the new companies have difficulties in developing their corporate image as they have no assets, like cash and structure, nor do they have clients or even a predictable thought how the finished result should resemble. Having a strong brand allows new firms to boost their visibility and ensure a certain level of value, increasing their chances of success. Branding is vital for a newly founded firm's survival and success because it supports the acquisition and retention of clients (Roshanzamir, 2018). (Bresciani & Eppler, 2010) provides an overview of existing brand building processes with regard to new venture branding. The study presents a framework and key recommendations for start-up branding, stating that small ventures should not compare their branding efforts to those of large global corporations. Startups face various difficulties, described by resource limitations, they experience – monetary, legal, and reputational risks. The fundamental goal of any such business is to gain a footing in the market and scale up. The majority of startups are founded on a unique idea for a service or product that is presented as a business proposition (Umashankar, n.d.).

### **III. Methodology**

This study adopts mixed methodology by adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods. In-Depth Interview with employee from the company and content analysis of various social media strategies adopted by the brand on Instagram and Facebook before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with a customer survey was conducted by the researcher. The reliability of the study is discussed with the help of snapshots of social media posts, campaigns, and events for support.

#### **3.1 Qualitative Research**

In-depth interview is being used as one of the qualitative approaches to gain understanding of the research problem. The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected employee of the company. The interview consists of a set of questions for the interviewee to shed light and knowledge. The interview not only helps in getting primary data for the analysis but also acts as a foundation for content analysis. In other words, the two-step qualitative analysis will strengthen the observations made in the due process of the research. The interview focuses on questions based on the interviewee's views, opinions and experience in the company and with the brand, integrated marketing communications strategies, key measures of the brand's image building and brand development. Direct questions on brand strategies were also included to receive a transparent and direct response on the research topic. The process of studying the brand's social media pages; Instagram and Facebook in particular helped identify and verify the brand strategies carried out. This method also helps to understand the growth in terms of their reach, visibility, style of outreach and public interaction and engagement. Qualitative study through content analysis methods helped to seek and explore the various layers that

undermine the aspect of impact or effect of social media presence of the brand. The sampling method used for content analysis is random sampling.

### **3.2 Quantitative Research**

Data was collected from 348 participants from across the nation, particularly from metropolitan cities. The survey mainly aims at understanding user knowledge of the brand, their perception on the company's goals and objectives, their opinion on the company's integrated marketing strategies including advertising and social media campaigns and engagement.

### **3.3 Significance of the study**

The main objective of doing this study is to understand how a startup based in a metropolitan city like Bengaluru grows and evolves into a successful and established brand. The study also hopes to understand the various brand development strategies adopted by the company to scale-up. As a growing concept of urban mobility and last mile connectivity, it seems to be important to understand how the startup grows and what key measures these startups take to be known and recognized. The study helps in understanding the key steps taken to spread brand awareness and knowledge. It also helps a brand to understand where they lack and what steps they can take to grow and improve. Furthermore, it helps the field experts and brand managers to analyze the brand's strategies for academic purposes and industrial knowledge. However, the key objective of the study is to acknowledge the various integrated marketing communication strategies a startup carries to reach their publics, potential customers, and stakeholders.

### **3.4 Objectives**

To understand and analyze the brand development and strategies adopted by the Bengaluru based mobility service startup, Yulu before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. To analyze the style of content on Yulu's social media platforms – Instagram and Facebook.
2. To draw a comparison between the strategies adopted before and during the COVID-19 pandemic w.r.t various factors – reach of social media posts, visibility, public interaction, and engagement.
3. To be able to create a foundation and basis to the analysis through a telephone-in depth interview with the company and by conducting a user perspective analysis through a survey.

### **3.5 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this research is as follows:

1. This study is designed to assess the hypothesis that a micro-mobility startup such as Yulu itself will perform consistently good through its initiatives and strategies to evolve as a brand.
2. Bengaluru as the third most populous city attracts an opportunity for micro-mobility services, like Yulu and acts as an advantage to attain their goals (alleviating traffic congestion and air pollution).
3. The growth of the startup Yulu is based on the following aspects : a. Word of mouth ; b. Social Media ; c. Visibility of the service ; d. Expansions and Partnerships

## **IV. DATA ANALYSIS**

The study is directed towards understanding the branding strategies adopted by Bengaluru based urban micro mobility startup, Yulu. This research tried to understand the various steps a startup takes, Yulu in specific to evolve from a startup to a brand. By definition, a company's brand strategy is a long-term, cross-departmental plan to attain specific, predefined goals. To

maximize the customer experience, competitive advantage, and financial efficiency, an effective brand strategy must be well-designed and implemented across all business areas.

These findings have been extracted from the analysis of their integrated marketing strategies adopted by the brand on Instagram and Facebook, as well as an in-depth interview and user analysis survey. The output of these particular strategies and campaigns is further analysed in the study on the basis of their presence, reach, public interactions, and style of outreach before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The key findings of this research are presented below:

## 1. Partnerships and collaborations

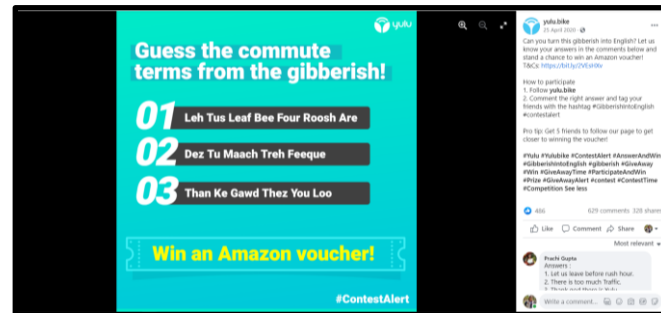
Partnering and expanding the services for additional advanced visibility, reach and utilisation has been one of Yulu's most successful strategies in its early months of business. Partnering with external organizations and events not only builds brand awareness and trust but also bridges the gap in expertise and knowledge. From the beginning of their launch, Yulu has always thrived with the help of numerous partnerships with governments, business tech parks, public transportation entities such as the Delhi and Bengaluru Metro, and Bajaj Auto Limited along with various Youth run organizations and events with a cause. Partnerships bring together brands to help them reach new markets, sell something new to their consumers, and improve their brand's perception. For a good relationship, the two brands must collaborate so that seeing them together appears natural and exciting.

Yulu has successfully partnered with many organizations like HYATT, Surprise Travel, ICYCLE, Bare Necessities, Salarpuria Sattva, Yuva Ignited Minds, ICFAI Business School, Quick Ride, and events with a cause such as Pedal for the Planet, Cycle for Pune, Cyclothon for child education, Cyclothon for women empowerment, Cyclothon for water conservation and many others under the campaign #Pedalthechange.



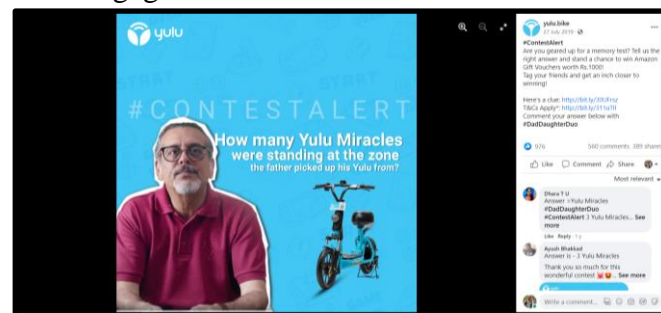
## 2. Contest Marketing Strategies

Companies use contests and sweepstakes as advertising resources to draw consumers to their businesses, products or services. A contest differs from a sweepstakes in that it allows entrants to complete a task, such as answering a trivia question, or to show talent or abilities. As marketing methods, both tools have been proved to be advantageous. As mentioned in the previous sections, during the pandemic, Yulu used this strategy to reach more people online and create brand awareness even though no one could go out much.



### 3. Two Step Approach

The lead is produced in the first step, and the sale is closed in the second step. In this scenario, the campaign advertisement by Yulu focusing on hassle free commute was the first step, and the second step was to create a contest based on it which allows the advertisement to receive traction as well with more engagement for Yulu as a whole.



### 4. Yulu Zone Launch

Through social media data analysis, it can be concluded that every time Yulu launched a new zone in a city or even launched Yulu services in a whole new city itself, public interaction and responses were recorded more than the last one. With this, an assumption can be made that Yulu's future across India will be very fruitful with their loyal and enthusiastic customers.



(Figure 1.13 : Expansion of Yulu zones)

### 5. Drawback Management and Feedback Implementation

Understanding the value of customer feedback data allows a company to gauge market demand and attract new customers. Data gathered by market analysis and surveys will help your company stay one step ahead of the competition. Consumer feedback data can provide valuable insights into areas such as customer responsiveness, product and service feedback, customer loyalty, as well as a better understanding of user patterns. Yulu makes sure to reach all the

feedback and make their services better. With all the feedback received by Yulu on its social media platforms, it deals with a very positive note. Yulu makes sure to respond to each feedback, suggestion and criticism with a convincing tone of improvement. This not only helps the brand to portray itself to be trustworthy but also creates a long-lasting image.



(Figure 2.2: Yulu's immediate reply to feedback)

## 6. Brand Extension Strategy

Launch of Yulu Miracle proved to be a boost to the brand image of the startup. Soon after the lunch in February 2019, the social media of Yulu saw a boost in impressions. The campaigns focused on smart cities, smart mobility and smart commute. This as a strategy to brand the service provided by Yulu as “smart” and “sustainable” helped catch more attention. Yulu also excites its users with rapid expansions in different zones of the city and new cities itself. Brand extensions can also be excellent marketing, enabling businesses to raise visibility and profit from publicity.



(Figure 1.7 Launch of Yulu Mirable Bikes)



## 7. Leveraging Timeliness

E-bikes have grown in popularity as a result of the COVID crisis. Yulu is the country's largest e-mobility service provider, with 10,000 electric vehicles spread across Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Bengaluru. Relevance is crucial when it comes to engaging consumers. To ensure that the consumer receives the content when they are ready to interact, one must first understand the larger context of their lives before focusing on the present moment. Yulu is timely with their social awareness and content, allowing people to connect and react better. Instagram handle of Yulu used this opportunity to promote the services despite the lockdown. Yulu's biggest strategy during these testing times was to use the service to its advantage.

Yulu is a single operated transport system, only one person can ride at a time. With this as their tactic, Yulu started promoting its services as the safest way of commuting to run errands during the months of 2020. Yulu's services and the concept of social distancing went hand in hand and played as an advantage to the brand.



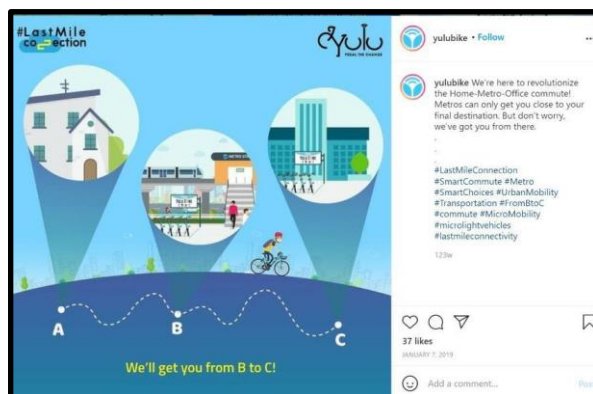
## 8. External brand communications

Blogs, articles, deatures, interviews, press conferences and events are some of the ways Yulu has been able to spread brand awareness. Brand communications played an important role in brand identity and long-term brand image.

## 9. Brand Messaging

Yulu believes in 3As: Accessibility, Availability and Affordability and makes sure it is implemented through the services they provide.





## 10. Yulu markets itself

During the interview, when asked about the lack of traditional advertising or marketing from Yulu's side, Ms. Manisha Choraria, Alliances and Partnerships at Yulu said "Yulu does not need marketing as it markets itself". This is an example of confidence in the brand and their custom loyalty as well.

## V. Conclusion

The research sheds light on the difference in strategies carried out and the difference in engagement on two different social media platforms, Instagram and Facebook. The unprecedented times of the pandemic posed challenges to all business, but Yulu found its way out of it with various strategies. Yulu is timely with their social awareness and content, allowing people to connect and react better. Yulu was also successful in exciting their users with rapid expansions in different zones of the city and new cities itself. Brand extension strategies enabled Yulu to raise visibility and profit from publicity. During the pandemic, Yulu stayed relevant through various contests and sweepstakes to reach more people online and create brand awareness even though no one could go out much. Partnerships through #Pedalthechange, helped Yulu to reach new markets, sell something new to their consumers, and improve their brand's perception. Moreover, the research also concludes that a pandemic can be a hurdle, but it can definitely not stop a company from growing.

## VI. Limitations

The study focused on only one startup from Bengaluru, if another company had been part of the study, an effective and definite conclusion could be drawn. Due to the COVID-19 situation, field work was not conducted which adds as a disadvantage to the study. The data collected and analyzed are inferred by the author. A better understanding could be developed through the annual reports and growth rate of the startup.

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