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Shooting 'Yohani' to Global Stardom: A Teaching Case of Social Media Strategy of a Top-10 YouTuber

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Shooting 'Yohani' to Global Stardom: A Teaching Case of Social Media Strategy of a Top-10 YouTuber

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Abstract:

This teaching case is about 'Yohani' – a Global YouTube sensation. Yohani's song 'Menike Mage Hithe' reached the top hits of Amazon music and Spotify, eventually making its way to the YouTube Top-10 global charts in September 2021. Gathering in-depth insights from the executive staff behind her record label company and her creative company, this teaching case demonstrates (i) the role of social media strategy in contemporary businesses and entrepreneurs; (ii) social media hygiene factors that one must consider; (iii) how social media insights gained through analytics assisted in delivering a carefully orchestrated business strategy and (iv) how a combination of social media platforms was employed, considering a range of technological, geographical, financial and social factors. The case and its teaching notes are suitable for undergraduate and postgraduate students studying a contemporary information systems management course.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Strategy, Youtuber, Teaching Case.

[Note: Teaching Note available upon request from Prof. Darshana Sedera, darshana.sedera@scu.edu.au]

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While [Yohani] has fans across age groups, it's the Gen Z that Yohani is most popular with. This is attributable to the fact that this audience spends perhaps the most amount of time on social media and music streaming platforms to discover music. ~ Rahul Balyan, Head of Music, Spotify (India)

1 Introduction

In mid-August 2021, when Yohani realized that her rendition of "Menike Mage Hithe" garnered soaring traction on social media with over 20 million views on YouTube and endorsement by renowned Bollywood icons, she was surprised. Her swift rise to out-and-out global fame witnessed the track reaching over 100 million views on YouTube in less than three months after its launch (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgCiiOxI41o>). The budding artist amassed massive engagement and online plaudit with over 2 billion, across several social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Tik Tok. Renowned as 'Yohani' in the international arena, she is a YouTuber who is a multi-instrumentalist, music producer, rapper and songwriter. Her song reached the top hits of Amazon music and Spotify charts in India, eventually making its way to the YouTube top 10 global charts in September 2021.

Yohani is an epitome of a global icon who used multiple social media platforms with engaging content to captivate a massive audience in a short lapse of time. This song appeared in many Instagram reels and Tik Tok videos. It was also used as a musical silhouette for several cinematic shots and dance covers. The sensational popularity of the song became a global hit, and it was adapted by many YouTube artists into more than 20 different languages across social media platforms. Among them were the covers in English, Bengali, Arabic and Nepali. These somewhat bizarre covers became popular amongst audiences all around the world.

Currently, the song has been viewed by over 200 million users on YouTube alone, with her YouTube channel reaching over 3 million subscribers. The track has been searched for and downloaded countless times on multiple social media platforms. Yohani's rise to international fame following the launch of her popular cover expanded her audience across the Indian sub-continent and it made her perform in a number of destinations, particularly in India and Dubai, as she captivated millions of netizens across the world.

While Yohani's success seems like a collage of arbitrary events that occurred on their own, the fact is that there are two companies – Pettah Effect and Theewra Worldwide – that carefully orchestrated Yohani's social media, strategizing and branding that led to this success.

Fortunately, Pettah Effect and Theewra were behind the branding [of Yohani]. We observed how the song releases were tracked and managed the entire process. There were lots of planning and using of tools behind this 'sudden boom'. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide



Figure 1. Yohani's Fame across the International Arena

2 Yohani's Journey to Stardom – The Background

The fame of the song "Menike Mage Hithe" grew dramatically across the Indian subcontinent following its release in May 2021. The song received massive recognition across several social media platforms

ranging from YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, MX Taka Tak, Tik Tok and Twitter, as a plethora of regional language cover songs and dance videos were created. It gained further traction when renowned celebrities and personalities in India applauded the song and shared their reactions on social media platforms.

Her channel has generated a big audience of 64.2 %, of which 54% is from India in the last 28 days. – Daily News (August 2021)

The rise of this track to fame resonates well with how some of the trending songs such as ‘Why This Kolaveri Di’ and ‘Despacito’ gained massive recognition, particularly across social media in the subcontinent. Pawan Agarwal, Director, Music Partnerships (India and South Asia) and Business Development at YouTube at Google, states that YouTube realized this trend about ten years ago when PSY’s Gangnam Style garnered over 1 billion views on YouTube in 2012.

Yohani received wider traction in India, particularly when Bollywood celebrities such as Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit, Priyanka Chopra, Jacqueline Fernandez, Krystle D’Souza Antigay Singha, Arjun Bijlani and Parineeti Chopra posted videos on social media, admiring her rendition.

For him [Amitabh Bachchan] to comment on it and share it on his Instagram and Twitter... we never thought anything like that would happen in our careers. – Yohani

Veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan’s tweet featuring an edited video of his dance moves (see the middle panel of Figure 1) from one of his blockbuster films posted across his Facebook and Instagram feeds was the turning point for Yohani to enrapture millions of Indians at a rapid rate as per Satheeshan, the original artist of the song Menike Mage Hithe who was featured on the cover version alongside Yohani, Dilanjan; the talent manager of Yohani and Banura, the CEO of Theewra worldwide who manages Yohani’s digital strategy.

Amitabh Bachchan tweeted about it. After that, it was everywhere. – Co-artist of the Song

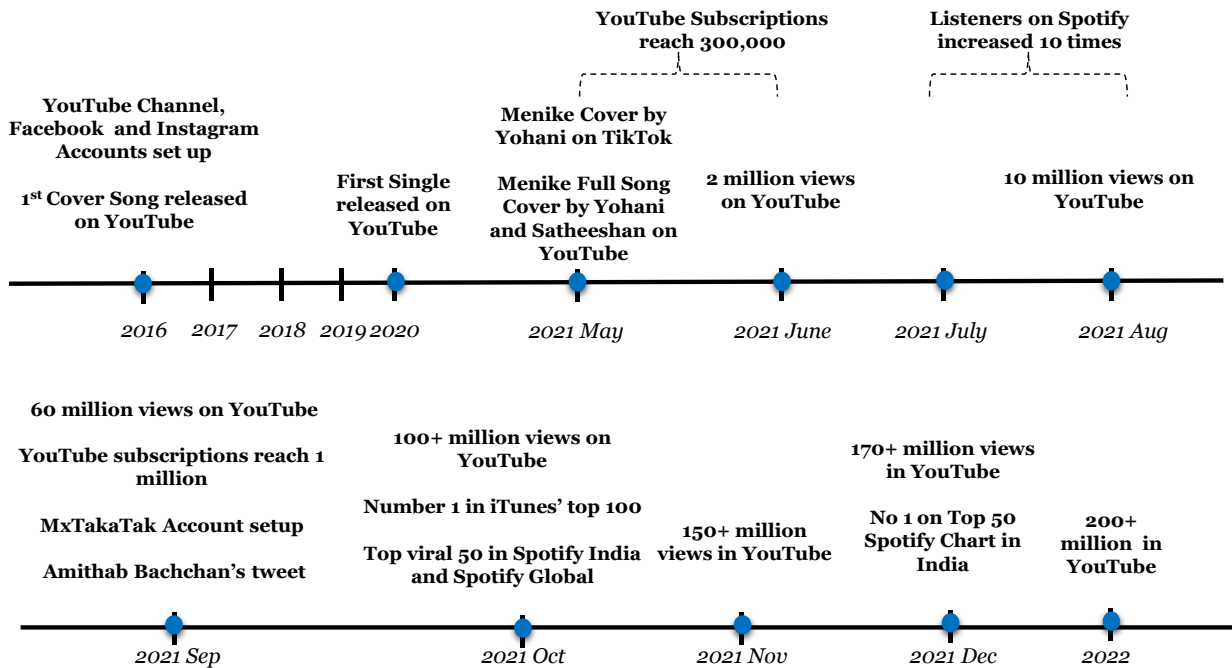
The surging popularity of the song among the social media users in India resulted in several covers dubbed in Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Punjabi and Bhojpuri languages by artists such as Muzistar, Anas Shajahan, Jalaj and Rajat Sharma. The fame of the cover grew across social media users in India when Yohani could perform with Bollywood celebrities such as Salman Khan and Ranveer Singh on TV shows. Yohani’s massive popularity was evident when this rising singing sensation signed up with an Indian Entertainment Company; Wingman India, which manages popular Bollywood stars such as Jaqueline Fernandez and the renowned record label, T-series. So...how did all of this happen? For the outsider, all of this seems like a very lucky coincidence. Yet, this is a story of careful planning by a highly dedicated team with a clear strategy and a keen eye on the market to change its plans dynamically.

2.1 The ‘Team’ behind Yohani’s Success

Yohani’s career as a YouTube artist can be traced back to 2016. The key milestones of Yohani’s journey to date and the coverage period of this teaching case are illustrated in Figure 2.

Then, in 2016, Theewra Worldwide and Pettah Effect discovered Yohani and entered into a formal and exclusive agreement to manage her performance career. Hereafter, her career as an artist was affiliated with the record label Pettah Effect and the digital advertising firm Theewra Worldwide. The two companies managed Yohani’s career as an artist, including the live performances, release of a number of songs, composition of music for various projects and brand endorsements.

I have a very passionate and competent team behind me. They take care of all operations, management and other such matters and this allows me to lock myself inside the studio and make music. – Yohani



Banura and Dilanjan co-founded Theewra worldwide; a digital advertising firm that runs a creative digital studio in 2012. The firm provides services under strategy, production, packaging, creative development, and market development verticals. The firm consists of a team of digitally savvy creative specialists for business solutions that investigate digital marketing drive, branding and hygiene. Banura is a director, co-founder and CEO of Theewra Worldwide, where he mainly oversees the areas of brand management, market research, growth strategy, communication strategy and digital strategy. Theewra Worldwide also manages Asia's first NFT Gallery named 'Kerrwh.'

Dilanjan is also the A and R Director at Pettah Effect, a record label that aims at bringing up young and talented artists. Pettah Effect expedites artist management, mastering of the tracks and music production. The two firms have been behind the succession and the social media strategy of Yohani since the beginning of her vocation as a youtuber. In fact, Yohani's rise to global fame brought international recognition to Pettah Effect. The role of Dilanjan is two-fold – he recruits artists to the label and management company Pettah Effect and sells talent as a talent manager. As an A and R director, Dilanjan looks into artist succession where he designs the grooming, sales, marketing and artist succession strategies. He holds the ultimate decision on producers they will work with, the kind of music they release, prospective collaborations and the media coverage in terms of artist succession pathways.

The scalability of a company is dependent on these assets we have as talent. When Yohani moved to a 1.4 billion market [in India], our scalability jumped to a greater extent. The manager's success depends on the artist's success. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Concerning the organizational structure of these two firms that work hand in hand in managing talent and their social media strategy, both our respondents emphasized that they have a flat structure, unlike in the case of a stereotypical corporate and the roles depend on each project.

Having a production company and a creative company on board at the same time was a great help to plan out these productions and creatives. I think that's a great advantage that Yohani has – she has the entire ecosystem under one umbrella. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

However, Theewra Worldwide's executive team includes the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Marketing Officer and Chief Operating Officer, who manage the firm with several creative directors, digital specialists, and brand specialists. There are many content producers, designers and sales executives that Theewra Worldwide allocates to a digital project such as Yohani. In relation to the social media strategy of artists and their branding, the creative director and the digital specialist play a significant role. Therein, the creative director handles social media marketing, blogging, digital marketing, creative strategy and social

media, while the digital specialist informs the team about the trends and the areas to be invested prior to proceeding with a creative.

We observe even the smallest thing...for example, if the soundtrack is too house heavy or rock heavy ...then, we have the director (music) to make the call. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

On the other hand, Pettah Effect, which manages artists such as Yohani with a global stance, is led by the A and R director and talent managers. The leadership team at Pettah Effect includes the director of sales and marketing, head of production and digital specialists who manage the planners and media buyers. In addition, there are several PR (public relations) specialists, content specialists, sound engineers, producers, production assistants, brand executives, musicians and artists within Pettah Effect. Their services include audio production, video production, branding, marketing, public relations, music distribution and artist management.

We have a great team... [that allows us to] play and develop tactical campaigns and tactical measures. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

2.2 Developing Yohani's Overarching Strategy

Theewra Worldwide and Pettah Effect followed a high-level road map strategy. As per the A and R director of Pettah Effect, it is the "foundation on which its tactical aspects are built upon." The primary aim of Pettah Effect is to develop a detailed blueprint for the artist and facilitate artist succession. Under Theewra Worldwide, the formulation and implementation of strategy take place, where it complements the objective of Pettah Effect. Theewra Worldwide has followed this strategy throughout for the artist succession at Pettah Effect, and as such, they followed the same strategy for Yohani de Silva irrespective of different milestones in her music vocation.

The overall strategy is never [based on] a year or based on a particular release...rather it is developed for the artist...so, Yohani's brand definition is important. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

The 'overall strategy' deployed includes three related perspectives: (i) creation of a buyer persona, (ii) brand definition, followed by (iii) brand activation, where the latter witnessed the development of several brand activation canvases that are sensitive to different contexts of the artist. The canvases assisted in positioning the brand definition and thereby, executing the overarching strategy of the artist. For instance, the canvas tracked all moves of Yohani since she began her vocation in music from her 'departure point' to her 'ambition.'

2.2.1 Yohani's Buyer Persona

Theewra Worldwide wanted to identify salient buyer personas for Yohani based on the genre of music, age group and the total audience. This exercise aimed to derive precise market segmentation, where Theewra Worldwide was involved in determining Yohani's target audience through extensive market research.

Eventually, Yohani was placed between the buyer personas; dreamers and lovers (See Figure 3). Her audience mainly consisted of teenagers and young adults. This allowed the team to drive their decisions related to the artist's social media strategy.

Initially we assumed that the teenagers were her audience – surprisingly [after market research], most of the responses were from 25 – 35 age groups. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

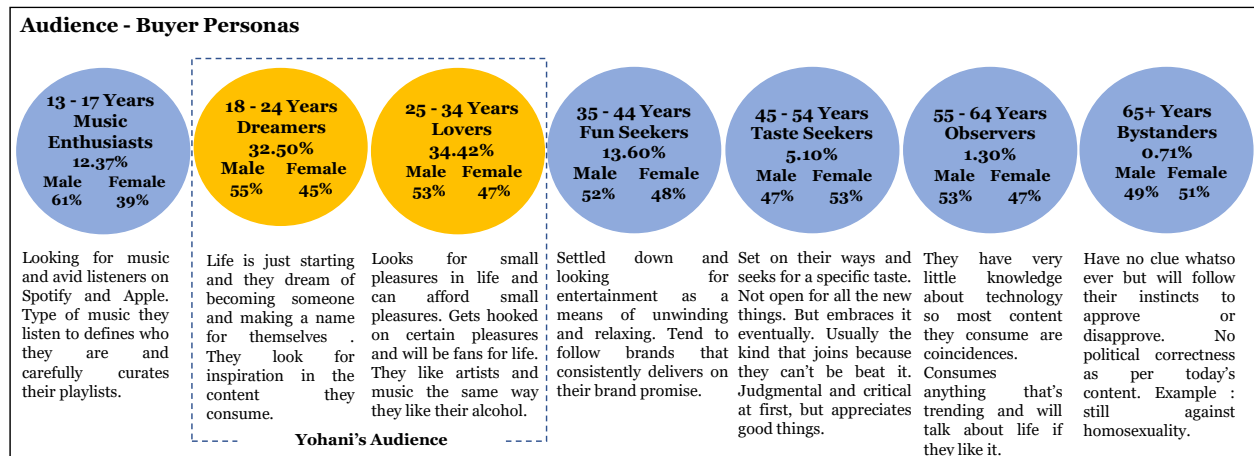


Figure 3. An Example of a Buyer Persona

2.2.2 Yohani's Brand Definition

The overarching strategy commenced by deriving a 'brand definition' specifically for Yohani. Therein, the teams from both companies considered various factors, including Yohani's personality to develop a suitable brand and the buyer personas.

The branding is about the artist. The fact that they [artists] are human beings and we need to understand them...nothing could be artificially engineered here. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Initially, the team delved into Yohani's personality to identify her brand and decide the buyer personas accordingly. The fact that they handled human beings had made them understand that nothing could be designed nor engineered, but it required a deep understanding in relation to their identity in a very personal sense. They openly built-up communication with the artists to dig into their lives and derive their true identity as individuals so that their audience can identify them as a 'brand'.

We dig into very crude and very personal things.... after that homework, we define the artist brand. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Hence a 'backstory' that portrayed the identity of Yohani to those around her and her prospective identity in the future was developed. This helped the team to make her brand positioning more consistent and portray her representation as an individual. Yohani's brand definition model was derived using an eight (8) step process: (1) Purpose, (2) Positioning, (3) People and Insights, (4) Values, (5) Personality, (6) Key Customer Drivers, (7) Brand Promise and (8) Experience Principles (see Figure 4). The latter part of their strategy addressed the vision and brand activation in relation to the artist. The model helped the team understand the brand in depth so that consistent decisions will cushion the positioning and show a strong representation of the brand – 'Yohani.'

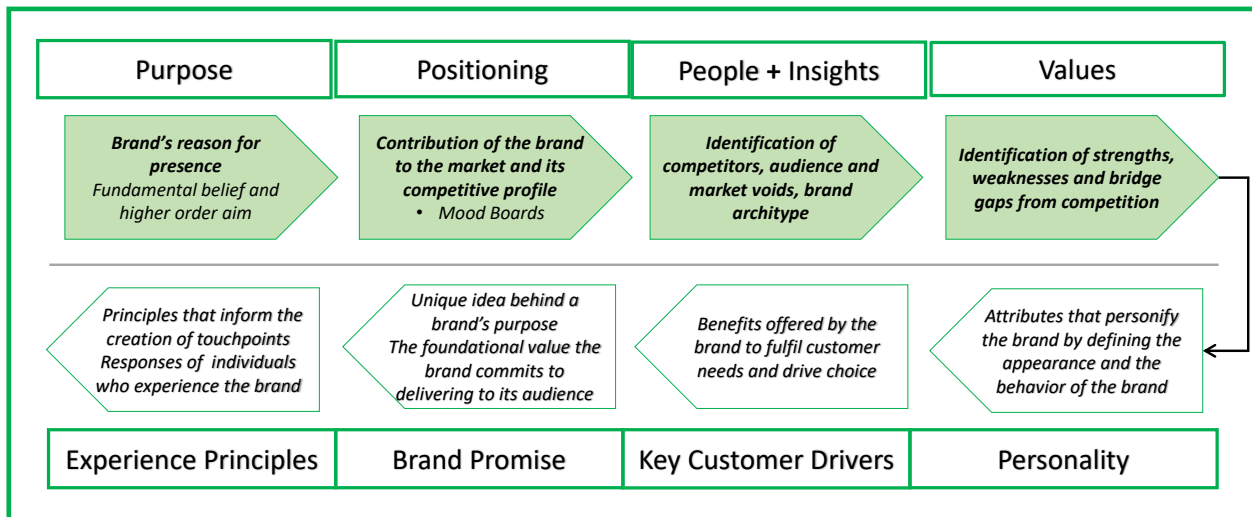


Figure 4. Brand Definition Model

2.2.3 Yohani's Brand Activation

The team deployed a brand activation methodology that features a canvas (see Figure 5). The brand activation canvas for each artist portrayed a timeline with the milestones that had already been achieved and planned for the future, as per the senses and responses the team received from the market, particularly via digital platforms. The departure point is the current situation of the brand, and the ambition portrays the objective of the brand that is targeted to reach within a specific time frame. The trajectory presents the path that the artist's brand will follow to move from the 'departure point' to the 'ambition' while the moves mark the strategic actions that drive the brand along the trajectory towards its ambition. The brand purpose, feels, signatures and behaviors were derived during the brand definition stage. The purpose entails the reason behind the artist's presence which was portrayed in her foundational belief and higher-order aim. The feels, signatures, and behaviors resonate with the personality and experience principles components of the brand definition model.

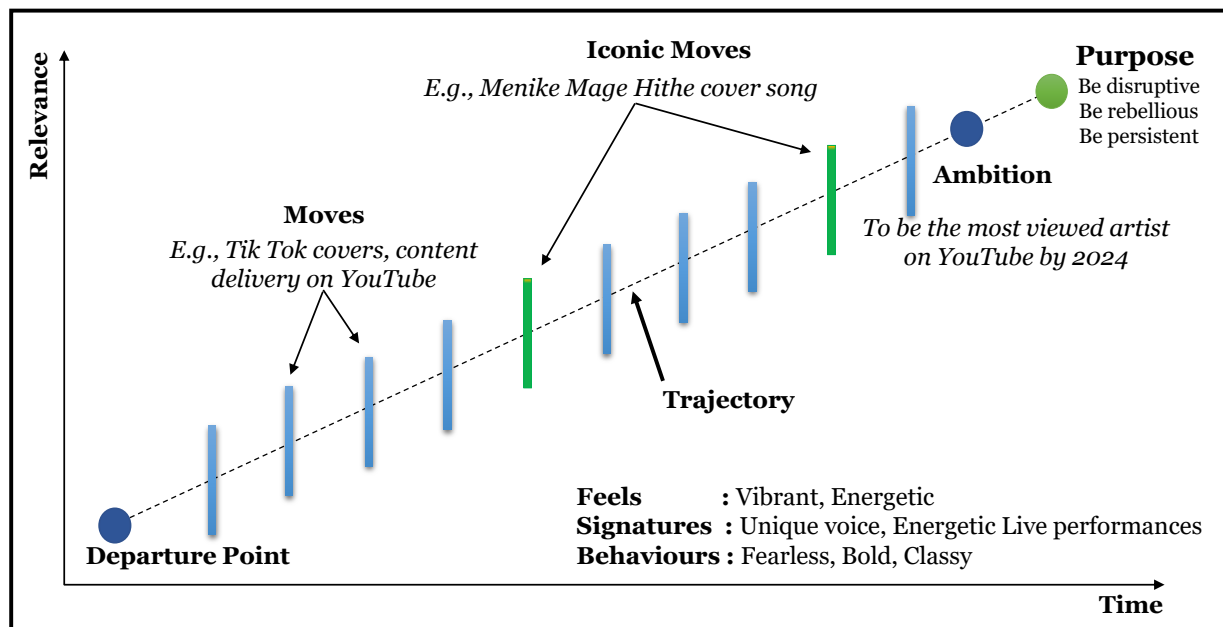


Figure 5. An Example of a Brand Activation Canvas

Our tagline 'the greatest genre-fluid artist of all time,' tells the positioning we created for Yohani ... So back in those statements only we designed the branding part of it. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Hence, at each iconic move of Yohani's trajectory towards her ambition, the team elevated the brand's feels, signatures and behaviors. For instance, although Yohani could be reached on social media prior to her surge in popularity, access to her brand via the social media platforms is limited due to such elevation of her branding followed by the iconic moves.

Moves should be consistent. In Yohani's case, she will put out content monthly or every other month and those are her moves. Yohani's first shot to fame is the 'Deviyange Bare' cover song which is an iconic move. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

3 Social Media Hygiene Factors

Yohani's existing social media accounts were handed over to Theewra Worldwide in 2016 to execute the overarching strategy, assist with the branding and keep up with the buyer persona. The Artist and Repertoire Director emphasized on 'social media hygiene,' which he referred to as the essentials that one must pay attention to when employing social media to execute one's overarching strategy. Therein, Yohani's talent manager and the A and R director of Pettah Effect highlighted the necessity of social media hygiene was set in motion by the team.

Starting with 'Yohani' as a keyword, we were careful with social media hygiene. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

3.1 Digital Identity

As Yohani joined the team Theewra Worldwide in 2016, her YouTube Channel, Facebook and Instagram accounts were created. To date, she has garnered a large number of followers and subscribers on these platforms. Although her Twitter account was set up five years before, it had been active with her content from 2017, one year after Yohani joined hands with the digital advertising firm. Her Tik Tok account was set up in December 2019. As her popularity grew across India, her MX Taka Tak account was also created with the assistance of an acquaintance of Dilanjan in India, as the app is not available in Sri Lanka.

It was identified that using consistent and few keywords was essential to retain Yohani's brand definition. As such, Pettah Effect and Theewra Worldwide only employed two keywords in promoting the artist: "MenikeMageHithe" and "Yohani." It was later identified through social media analytics that a majority of her audience had only used the keywords Yohani and Manike in their search requests. Moreover, all social media platforms were created using the common username "Yohani Music."

We claimed Yohani Music on all social media platforms...Wikipedia, Google business, her Twitter, sound cloud, YouTube...one username. Yohani music. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Hence, Yohani's hygiene was digitally positioned. She could be easily located with the trending keywords at the time, in contrast to the other artist featured in the cover song.

During the hype in India, we had many channels for Yohani. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

3.2 Constant Sensing

The team constantly monitored the trends in the market and the artist's audience. However, they also had access to information resulting from various brand and event engagements that Yohani had done. Such initiatives facilitated market research insights and allowed them to remain grounded with the audience. They were able to align the behaviors of the artist that were derived under the personality vertical of the brand definition model.

As the song gained increased traction, the team sensed its rapid creation around Yohani's brand, particularly from the numerous tags, mentions and reactions on the artist's social media platforms. The song's organic reach was apparent on YouTube as it continued to get traction, particularly across India. The team identified the significant traffic building up from several sources across India such as Kerala and Mumbai when the song was organically placed in their trending list as a looming content piece. The song

was gaining traction across platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram and Twitter as individuals from different walks of life created their routines on the song.

Then the famous cricketers, movie stars, singers and influencers in the Indian market picked up the trend. It got picked up by the TV shows and she got to appear in them. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

As the A and R director sensed highly personal traits inculcated in her, the backstory that helped him define her brand with her identity, its depiction to others and her prospective identity was created. The buyer personas were developed for Yohani after sensing her target audience. To identify artist's target audience, market research was conducted deploying Facebook audience insights, Facebook business manager, Facebook ads manager and YouTube studio. Although the team assumed the teenagers to represent her audience, the highest traction for the advertisements run for the song hailed from those who belonged to the 25 – 34 years age group.

On Facebook, we categorized these personas according to the geographical location, age groups and ran the advertisements. We could then see which group performed better. Surprisingly, most of the responses were from 25 – 34-year age groups. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide.

The team also sensed the contemporary market voids as they defined the artist's brand, and it enabled them to decide as to where the brand could be placed. For instance, a void may be found in relation to unique fashion statements and performing artists. These voids were used to define the key customer drivers that feature the benefits offered by the artist as a brand. The team also sensed the archetype of the brand using the insights they received as they crafted her backstory.

While the personal insights were further used to sense the artist's values, personality and brand promise, the team derived the experience principles of the brand that addressed the customer experience at each touchpoint. This helped them define Yohani's digital presence and it depicted the buyer persona audience that is interacting at each touchpoint such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok and other non-digital media platforms. The experience principles portrayed how the team sensed the artist's behavior at each touchpoint and how the audience felt her conduct.

We defined these based on top of who she really is... Yohani is remembered because she is true to herself very consistently. She is not adapting to the market changes. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

The team sensed the suitable touchpoints following the derivation of the artist's buyer personas, where it was apparent that Facebook would be the most commonly used platform among her buyer personas set in different contexts. Furthermore, the trends and the reactions of the market were sensed through the YouTube backend that portrayed the sources of traffic. For instance, when the team realized the spike in traffic sourced from Kerala in India, they constantly monitored the trends such as the watch hours and the devices used. However, when YouTube pushed the content organically, the team sensed that it had also penetrated other markets.

We saw this organically in Kerala. Then we saw a massive spike in Mumbai. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

The team used Hootsuite insights powered by Brand watch, Google display network and Google search network to sense the reactions of Yohani's personas and their channels. For instance, the content was being pushed by the social media platforms as the hashtags "MenikeMageHithe" and "Yohani" were gaining massive traction and this was apparent on google analytics.

As advertisers, when a particular content piece gets a lot of traction, we identify that from analytics – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

In addition, they obtained information from google keyword research and offline data from media stations such as the press, television and radio channels. They also had other agencies located in the USA that provided the team with information in relation to Spotify.

When we wanted to advertise on Spotify, they helped us through their channels because they had data from Spotify – this happened after the release of "Menike Mage Hithe. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

As the team targeted further, the buyer persona was further defined. They carried out basic targeting covering the occupation, places, age category and relationship status. In the case of Yohani's brand, Facebook and Instagram were used to identify data points in relation to the interests.

Facebook identifies that you go out on Friday, you associate with coffee, and you are friends with these people who have the same data points. Hence, that backend allows an advertiser to target you based on those interests. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

On the branding activation canvas used under the brand activation stage, the team monitored the moves made by the artist despite the levels of engagement it generated. The canvas portrayed the sensed purpose, ambition and the trajectory along which the artist consistency maintained.

3.3 Constant Responding

It was apparent that the song was organically reaching traction on YouTube. At this point, the team decided to use YouTube only as a content platform, while Facebook and Instagram were used as advertisement engines. As they sensed that Tik Tok was not widely used across India, they established Yohani's identity on a platform widely used by Indians named MX Taka Tak. They placed a banner of the song on this platform as the feature was not available on Tik Tok.

Now, let's say we have identified a teenager who has access to the internet, has a decent job, goes out on Friday nights, listens to rock and roll music, and goes to the barista for coffee is Yohani's audience. Then how you translate that persona to digital is the question. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

However, in the case of targeting, they had to identify the kinds of interests that a particular individual possessed and match their persona. On YouTube search, the team could target people with their search queries, while on Google, they could target individuals with a specific search term using Google Ads search queries.

We had search queries aligned with the interest at that time- but they were not predominantly on songs. Based on some common behaviors found among her fans, we identified the audience that will listen to an artist like Yohani. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

In order to create different dance routines and distribute the content across social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram and Facebook, the team contacted influential dancers via these platforms, or an agency and they could populate the song smoothly even prior to its release. Furthermore, each touchpoint's content piece was curated to match the buyer persona created during the brand definition stage. For instance, Instagram was used for short versions, while YouTube was used for more extended versions of content. Technologies such as adobe premiere, DaVinci resolve, photoshop, illustrator and lightroom were also used to craft the content pieces. The team also identified the buyer persona representing the specific age groups using insights from the Facebook backend and targeted those demographics and platforms to groom their communication strategy.

We identified which age group dominates the market in that particular area and the channels they use. Then we targeted those channels and demographics through our communication. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Under the experience principles vertical of the artist brand definition, the team derived her audience's behaviors and expectations. Accordingly, Yohani provided experiences such as 'questionable yet unique voice, unconventional looks, daring attitude and unstoppable lifestyle,' while her brand message resonated with disruptive, rebellious and combative attributes. Hence, it was assured that all the content pieces released on different platforms under Yohani's brand complied with the branding guideline that her team created for her.

We have cracked her brand and established her personalities, value and the whole proposition of the brand and the USBs (unique selling benefits). – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

All other touchpoints apart from the digital touchpoints such as TV, radio and ground-level also required alignment as her identity required to be maintained consistently across all platforms. Yohani's songs are statement pieces that influence behavior. Hence, the team addressed this behavior apparent through data where the values picked from Yohani's personality during the brand definition stage were amplified and curated to a suitable format. As the team expedited the brand activation methodology, they ensured that

the brand and its inherent feels, signatures and behaviors were upgraded at each iconic move on the canvas.

We have [embedded] values for our artists - if you look at Yohani's digital presence, she has not aligned herself politically, religiously or sexually. That is her hygiene factor. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

The team handled the responses concerning the foreign markets tactfully, where they obtained the services outside their parameters via the delegation of tasks to an external party. For instance, Yohani is being managed by Sonu Lakshwani in India and similarly, they have different promoters with whom they work in other markets.

I want to run an Ad for Kerala [on Facebook or Instagram]... we had to align with a partner who will understand our requirement and shares the enthusiasm under a vision. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

3.4 Regular Engagement on Social Media

The responses from Yohani's audience on social media were mainly received as direct messages or comments on the social media platforms. However, monitoring the thousands of reactions the artist received during the spike over her rise to international fame had been quite challenging.

Those are not practical methods because when you put up a content, there will be like 1000 odd comments, 1000 odd messages coming in. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Albeit the above challenge, social media platforms, except for YouTube, offered them a favorable feature where the comments posted from a verified account holder were automatically pinned to the top of the comments. In fact, Yohani received many such comments from renowned personalities around the world on several platforms and they helped the team identify the levels of engagement from different audiences, especially during the spike.

So, let's say a verified account holder posted a comment and you can immediately see that as it gets pinned to the top of the comments. This happens on Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok. But on YouTube, – you need to go through and check. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The team also used the number of hashtags created for "Menike Mage Hithe" on platforms such as Instagram to identify the number of hashtags created for the song.

When you release a song or a content piece on Tik Tok, for that particular music track – you can see the number of re-creations that have been done. That way, we can identify trends and we do this almost on every platform. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

3.5 Content Alignment with Digital Persona

The content pieces released across Yohani's social media platforms were made to resonate with the branding guideline crafted exclusively for the artist. For instance, the hygiene factor for Yohani is 'non-alignment'. The digital team monitored and clarified the behavior of her audience, represented by her buyer personas and how it affected her across social media platforms. This process was more creatively driven as a creative purpose was driving them. Despite the number and rate of interactions or the location, the consistency of her brand and content was maintained throughout her vocation as an artist.

Every content piece, every copy, every statement is curated, tailored and properly aligned with the brand guideline and her positioning. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

For instance, a story posted by Yohani on a social media platform such as Instagram or Facebook or a comment posted by her on social media was controlled by the brand guideline set for her and her behavior on these platforms laid within the set parameters. As such, all the captions created by Yohani on social media were consistent with her tone.

If you look at Yohani's comments... they are always three hearts. They are not very verbal. This is how consistent we are with the brands. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Yohani was guided by a consistent principle both digitally and non-digitally to the extent that aspects such as her attire maintain consistency throughout in a way that her brand is positioned well. Given that a change occurred in relation to the artist's social media engagement or content delivery, it was consistently

implemented across all platforms. This was convenient for the team as Theewra Worldwide managed all the digital channels of Yohani and no third party handled her public relations related tasks.

If we break down the content, the product itself has the same mixture – same ingredients and same recipe. It is consistent – it does not change. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

All content uploaded on Yohani's social media platforms featured the hashtag #yohani, allowing her prospective fans to locate her content and engage with them easily.

3.6 Public Relations Drive to position Social Media Hygiene

The digital team at Theewra Worldwide followed "content optimization" to ensure the delivery of suitable content pieces via the most appropriate channel.

Although it's the same piece of content, each channel will prioritize some technicalities of a specific content piece. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Their PR strategy provided the team with the required legitimate support and authenticity. The other channels where they could have media placements on television, radio or press were sound brand endorsements for the artist to boost their social media drive.

When you interview with a good tv show host, that gives some credibility to that story. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The team distributed the placements strategically across their timeline so that the cover song picked up traction gradually.

After Menike Mage Hithe, we wanted to release 'Moving on'; the first global release with a local artiste. In that case, we used this PR drive to hype the situation and used social media to complement that. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

3.7 Yohani's Consistency as an Artist

Theewra Worldwide has ensured that Yohani's brand was maintained across all her social media platforms with an aura of consistency throughout. Since the beginning of her vocation as a YouTube artist, different content pieces featuring her talent were distributed across multiple platforms regularly.

Yohani was already a star - she is a consistent artist with her content delivery. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

The song Menike Mage Hithe was not the mere reason behind the growing popularity of Yohani. It was the consistency she showcased as an artist with regular content delivery across various social media platforms. In fact, this was mapped as the team drafted her trajectory across their brand activation canvas. When the channels are kept active, its inherent algorithm automatically pushes the content, owing to the consistent content delivery across that channel. In the case of Yohani as well, the team had a consistent plan in place to support the content platform algorithm.

We ensured that the content is there whenever the users are looking for it. When you keep the platform idle for a long time, the algorithm acts negative- it doesn't support that. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The song gave the young artist more visibility to rise to global fame. Nonetheless, a substantial buyer persona acknowledged her presence due to her consistency on digital platforms, particularly as a youtuber. In fact, her team encouraged her to release more covers on social media and some of her covers of songs such as 'Pehla Nasha / Penena Nisa' and 'Umbrella and Clean Bandit' were released as she gained traction as a novice YouTube artist. Yohani's cover of the song 'Deviyange Bare' by Drill Team was a turning point in her music vocation as the Sri Lankan community embraced it with massive engagement across social media, mainly across YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. It triggered her to do more covers while also allowing the team to identify the suitable domain for Yohani.

The community immediately picked this content piece, and it was reshared. That's how the name Yohani went to the market and that triggered her to do more. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Short versions of the content pieces featuring her cover songs and the single releases were regularly posted on platforms such as Instagram, Tik Tok and Twitter, while the complete versions were released

on YouTube. The team maintained a diversified routine to distribute content featuring her work and the pieces gained traction through several features such as stories, posts, reels and tweets. Her brand guideline was also personified in each content piece across all platforms.

From the time to Menike to now, she had single releases and music videos. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

4 Yohani's Social Media Platform Mix

Pettah Effect and Theewra Worldwide carefully assessed the features, loopholes, benefits and functions of a plethora of social media platforms to promote Yohani. There were instances where certain social media platforms were not available in some geographical locations. For example, platforms that are less known to the world, but are popular in certain countries were selected. Similarly, it was discovered that, even within the same social media platform, geographic restrictions meant that Pettah Effect and Theewra Worldwide had to select a mix of social media affordances.

This section portrays how different platforms were used to manage her brand, particularly around the song release; Menike Mage Hithe.

4.1 YouTube

Yohani's song Menike Mage Hithe was released on her YouTube channel on the 22nd of May 2021. YouTube was used as a content platform to deliver the more extended versions of the content and it was not used as an advertisement engine owing to two main reasons. Given that traffic for content hails from external sources, the algorithm automatically pushes the content up as it is favorable to YouTube when more users from outside their network reach their network. However, if they ran advertisements on YouTube, the organic reach would automatically reduce to attract more funds, as its algorithm would detect that the advertisements were internally sourced, and it was disadvantageous to the team.

This entire social media act as an ecosystem. We push the shorter version of the content they want the viewers to watch in all other channels and direct that traffic to YouTube to get them engaged in the longer version. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Hence, the team aimed to beat the recommended traffic to outside traffic upon the video's release. As the song was organically reached with its growing popularity, the team did not consider running advertisements on YouTube as the traction was sufficient for them.

We were getting enough traction from YouTube. We had almost 100 million views at that time – now it's over 200 million. So, it was enough for us to boost other platforms; it was organically picking up. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

While YouTube not being the most cost-effective platform to run advertisements, with the market research data they possessed as per the segmentation of the buyer persona, the team understood that Yohani's audience does not use YouTube frequently. The song was gaining organic reach on YouTube because it received substantial traction beyond the shores of Sri Lanka. It was organically placed as an upcoming content piece in their trending list. However, it was not related to paid advertising. The number of tags and mentions on YouTube mainly indicated to the team that the cover was gaining increased traction across the world.

With the help of the analytics provided by the YouTube backend, the team identified the first trigger point of Yohani's rise to fame across the Indian subcontinent; Kerala being the major source of traffic. This platform allowed them to target, run and distribute content. It reflected the sources of traffic, devices used to watch the song, the number of watch hours and the number of seconds being watched from the entire music video. Although the team monitored the trends once or twice a week on YouTube, the vast traction that led to a large spike demanded constant monitoring during this stage.

We could see large spikes of traffic coming from Kerala, overnight– then we knew this was picked up by Kerala from YouTube algorithms. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The next highest traffic source was Mumbai and the analytics showed them that the cover was trending rapidly. Towards the end of October 2021, the cover was on the YouTube Charts for Top Music Videos for eleven consecutive weeks. Currently, the cover song has garnered over 200 million views and 5.8 million likes on YouTube and the overall subscriptions of Yohani's channel reached the milestone of 300,000 in

just five days after the release of the song Menike Mage Hithe. The song crossed 100 million views on YouTube in less than four months after its release and it indicated the growing traction of the song across the world.

4.2 Instagram

Instagram was used to distribute content on the song and its prominent features such as the posts and stories were used by the digital team at Theewra Worldwide to drive more engagement towards the song and direct traffic to Yohani's YouTube channel.

Instagram – works best for short videos. There are certain proportions – technical aspects that we need to have in place when we publish content pieces on Instagram. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The Tik Tok video of Yohani singing a part of the song Menike Mage Hithe before recording the entire song with Satheshan was posted on Instagram with the caption "For those who don't have Tik Tok accounts." This post has garnered over 650,000 views and it was shared on Instagram on the 16th of May 2021. The cover gained high traction in Kerala for the first time in India and it was triggered by a celebrity content piece that made many Instagram users create covers on the song. This trend was apparent from the number of tags, mentions and comments on Instagram.

The trigger point was a piece of content created by a celebrity on the cover song where so many other covers were being created. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Indian social media influencer and music producer Yash Raj Mukhate's cover of the Manike Mage Hithe, which crossed 15 million views by October 2021, had been one of the earliest covers that triggered interest in the track among many Indians on Instagram. The song was widely used on Instagram reels which were popular in India. Tiger Shroff's dance cover gained over 20 million views and Sonu Nigam's video gained over 180,336 views and 23,383 likes on Instagram. Madhuri Dixit's video admiring the song has garnered over 3 million views by early September. As these celebrities had already garnered billions of followers on their Instagram, the song gained traction at a rapid rate.

On Instagram, she was getting direct messages from Bollywood celebrities and artists. When the celebrities picked up, it was just smooth sailing for everyone else. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Although Instagram reels were popular in India, the reels were not available in Sri Lanka. Hence, the music couldn't be picked for reels in Sri Lanka, where the song originated.

From a digital strategic perspective, in terms of platforms, the biggest market in India is Instagram reels - reels are not available in Sri Lanka. Instagram music is not available in Sri Lanka, so they can't pick the music. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

As Theewra Worldwide also had the music expertise from Pettah Effect, they identified the 'punch' that immediately registered in the minds of the audience and created small excerpts of the video to distribute on Instagram. Posts featuring some of the key events in relation to the song such as the song reaching a milestone on Spotify streams, the pre-launch post on the Menike Mage Hithe dance cover that featured Yohani and some posts featuring her engagement with Bollywood celebrities were posted on Instagram till October 2021.

This song was organically reaching and content creators started to sing this part- "maa hitha langama dawetana" - this part was picked up by reels. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

4.3 Facebook

Facebook was used as one of their major advertisement engines and the ultimate aim was to drive traffic to Yohani's YouTube Channel. The team also gained insights in relation to the song's engagement levels through reactions, comments and shares on Facebook. Through their market research in relation to Yohani's audience across Sri Lanka, they also realized that Facebook is the platform used by a majority of them despite the area from which they hailed.

If you look at Yohani's audience –most of them are on Facebook, but sometimes YouTube does not penetrate as much as Facebook. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Furthermore, in contrast to other platforms, running advertisements on Facebook is the most cost-effective means of retaining many views and engagement. Although running advertisements on Facebook could destroy the organic reach of the posts, the organic reach of Facebook was not considered as it was solely optimized for advertisements.

We realized if we can run ads on Facebook and bring the traffic to YouTube, there is a chance that we can help this organic success. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Hence, Facebook helped them gain the required engagement for the content they posted to advertise the song Menike Mage Hithe. The team sensed the audience that engaged better with the song in the first round of advertisements and decided to optimize the next set to cater to the 25 –35 year age group, which showcased the highest engagement levels.

It purely happens because of the engagement; the comments, reshares and likes we get within the platform. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

As the first trigger point in the popularity surge of the cover was witnessed by the audience in Kerala in India, the team decided to run advertisements on Facebook. Advertisements were done as per the platform and there exist over 20 placements for Facebook advertisements. Hence, the team had a call to action for each content piece they shared on Yohani's official Facebook page. For instance, the content pieces shared on Facebook feed were in full HD (high definition) version while the content was in vertical angle when they used Facebook stories to post advertisements.

In Facebook Marketplace, square sized content pieces are posted- for this, the thumbnail is prepared separately. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The team picked the correct excerpt of the entire cover to place the advertisement for the target audience. For instance, they conducted a pre-launch phase for the song. As Facebook and Instagram possess the same advertisement engine and the back end, the team also had the option of immediately pushing the posts from Instagram to Facebook.

So, if the song is about to be released next week, we had pieces going out from 2-3 weeks prior. We carefully selected the right time snaps from the song. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

4.4 Tik Tok

Yohani's post featuring the song on Tik Tok reached substantial views and it paved the way for the release of its full version on YouTube in the following week. Tik Tok was used as a content platform that helped Yohani gain traction even before this milestone. At that time, this platform was fairly novel to Sri Lanka and the team identified features that helped them gain more engagement from the content.

Tik Tok allows one to build upon one's application success; the more you use in-app features - you get more views on the app. It puts you to your 'for you page' (FYP). – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Tik Tok was an ideal platform to share short video content and Team Theewra Worldwide positioned a Tik Tok campaign where small excerpts of every content piece released on YouTube were distributed on the artist's Tik Tok feed.

On Tik Tok, we used small cuts of that longer version of the song. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

The content was created on Tik Tok itself to gain increased traction across the platform. However, the team uploaded a video clip that was professionally recorded outside and underwent an editing process on Tik Tok to align with its set parameters.

Every content piece was professionally created outside –it went through the app and the editing process before we posted it. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Short excerpts of the Tamil version and the song's dance cover, which were released later, were posted on Yohani's Tik Tok feed. The main indication of increased traction around the cover were the number of tags and mentions on Tik Tok. Actor Siddharth Nigam's Tik Tok video featuring the song and mention on Yohani can be cited as an example.

In India, there are pocket audiences for each of the micro-influencer. Their followers immediately started creating content around it. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

Although Tik Tok was not commonly used in India, the song was trending in the surrounding areas such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal, where the languages Hindi and Urdu are used.

Tik Tok cover was reaching Bangladesh at a rapid rate and at this point, they identified that they had broken the language barrier. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

Many renowned artists began to create their routines on the song and it was popular among social media users in Kerala in a short lapse of time. As Mumbai began to gain traction, the users created more content on Tik Tok.

4.5 MX Taka Tak

Yohani's talent manager took the initiative to get an account for Yohani on the MX Taka Tak platform which is similar to Tik Tok yet quite popular across India. This platform, unlike the others, offered Pettah Effect and Theewra Worldwide some geographical specificity in India to promote Yohani's songs. This platform, similar to the features and functions of Tik Tok, is also popular amongst the Indian movie stars and sports celebrities.

This platform also offered the option of placing a banner where an Indian agency expedited it for the team. Yohani joined MX Taka Tak in August 2021 and posted her first video welcoming other MX Taka Tak users to create videos on her song, Menike Mage Hithe. Two short clips featuring Yohani in a dance cover and the Tamil version of the song were posted in 2021.

There is a platform called MX Taka Tak - the equivalent of Tik Tok. – A and R Director, Pettah Effect

4.6 Twitter

Although Yohani's Twitter account was set up in 2011, Twitter has been rarely employed for promoting Yohani. This is a stark contrast to what had been observed in relation to most other celebrities, where Twitter is being employed regularly to promote songs. However, the managing companies employed Twitter to direct traffic to the full cover song on her YouTube Channel.

They also employed Twitter, when the legendary Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan tweeted on the song, which created a massive spike in engagement across social media users in India.

This led to a spike in Mumbai. and the response was amazing. We never expected that kind of a turnaround – it was like a 180 flip for us. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

5 Conclusion

This teaching case portrays the pivotal role of social media which played an important role in a youtuber's success. It demonstrates how the two firms – Theewra Worldwide and Pettah Effect – who manages the artist, observed the hygiene factors of social media platforms, and aligned a portfolio of social media platforms with an overarching strategy featuring the artist's buyer persona, brand definition and brand activation. The teaching case also highlights how a mix of social media platforms mix that one could engage with factors such as context, maturity and timing. This teaching case has a number of implications for both students and practitioners, where it showcases how the team behind Yohani's success orchestrated social media, considered the eco-system of social media, utilized the affordances of social media and observed the hygiene factors to define and activate her brand.

The strategy followed by Theewra Worldwide and Pettah Effect collectively managing her artist succession strategy and digital strategy identified her vision statement as, 'To be the Greatest Genre Fluid artist of all time. – CEO, Theewra Worldwide

This teaching case allows you to reflect on the overarching questions of,

1. How does one design a social media portfolio, considering their affordances, to plan and execute their business strategy?
2. How social media plays a vital role in facilitating the buyer persona creation, brand definition and brand activation?
3. What are the basic and salient factors (i.e., hygiene factors) of social media platforms one must consider, when deriving a social media portfolio?

4. Considering the dynamic and evolutionary landscape of social media, how does one continuously monitor such changes to align one's own social media strategy?

Further, more specific questions are developed as a Teaching Note, which can be obtained by contacting the corresponding author. The Teaching Notes are developed under nine modules, each module discussing a unique perspective related to the Teaching Case, accompanied by a summary of the key literature, a prescribed textbook, and a series of sample discussion questions.

Acknowledgments

If there are any acknowledgments, this is where they go. Neither acknowledgments nor references have a roman numeral. Once you finish the body of your paper, you are done with numbering the level one headings. In all other respects (font size, font color, bolding, spacing before and after), the headings for acknowledgments and references are level one headings. Therefore, you can apply the "**Heading 1**" quick style and delete the number of these sections. This will not distort the numbering of other sections.

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