

Date	04.11.2025
Publication	AdGully
Headline	IdeationX 2.0: Ravindra Sharma on how SBI Life is turning youth innovation into brand purpose
Reach	3,08,406

IdeationX 2.0: Ravindra Sharma on how SBI Life is turning youth innovation into brand purpose

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Views: 803



In a financial landscape defined by digital disruption and changing consumer expectations, SBI Life Insurance is charting a distinct path—one anchored in purpose, empowerment, and co-creation. At the centre of this evolution is IdeationX, the company’s flagship youth innovation platform that invites India’s brightest B-school minds to reimagine life insurance for a new generation of consumers.

Now in its second edition, IdeationX 2.0 has expanded from 8 campuses to over 100, engaging more than 30,000 students nationwide. But beyond its impressive scale lies its deeper intent: to humanize and simplify life insurance through ideas that blend technology with empathy, transforming protection into a tool of empowerment. For **Ravindra Sharma, Chief of Brand, Corporate Communications & CSR at SBI Life Insurance**, the initiative reflects the perfect convergence of the brand’s philosophy - “Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye” - and its long-term innovation vision.

In this conversation with Adgully, Ravindra Sharma discusses how IdeationX 2.0 is shaping the future of life insurance through youth-led innovation, how SBI Life’s refreshed identity is deepening emotional connection, and why authenticity and empowerment are becoming the new currencies of brand storytelling.

What was the core idea behind launching IdeationX, and how do you see the second edition pushing the boundaries of innovation in the life insurance sector?

IdeationX is SBI Life's flagship youth innovation platform, designed to tap into the curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving mindset of young thinkers. The platform provides bright minds from India's leading B-schools an opportunity to challenge conventions and develop innovative solutions that can transform life insurance, making it simpler, more accessible, and more meaningful for consumers.

Building on the success of the first edition, IdeationX 2.0 expanded from 8 to 100 campuses, engaging over 30,000 students. In doing so, it has encouraged participants to explore solutions that not only leverage technology, AI, and a digital-first approach but also reflect a deeper purpose: making life insurance more meaningful by empowering individuals to pursue their dreams confidently, while ensuring their loved ones are protected.

What excites us most is seeing these ideas move beyond innovation for its own sake—they aim to simplify, expand, and humanize life insurance, creating solutions that truly resonate with the aspirations of people today.

With 30,000+ B-school students participating this year, what kind of disruptive or consumer-centric ideas do you expect will emerge from the initiative?

The true value of IdeationX lies not just in generating ideas, but in creating a strategic lens for the industry to address long-standing challenges that have historically limited the reach and relevance of life insurance. By bringing together 30,000 of India's brightest minds, we are creating a platform for fresh perspectives that question the status quo and envision solutions beyond conventional frameworks.

From this initiative, we expect to see concepts that fundamentally simplify life insurance for consumers, make engagement intuitive, and position protection not just as a product but as a tool that empowers individuals and secures the well-being of their loved ones.

More importantly, these ideas are being shaped by the very generation that will drive the future of financial decisions. This means the solutions emerging from IdeationX have the potential to be both transformative and enduring—addressing structural gaps in the industry and redefining how life insurance is perceived, purchased, and experienced.

How does SBI Life plan to integrate the winning ideas from IdeationX 2.0 into its broader business and customer engagement strategy?

At SBI Life, IdeationX is far more than an academic engagement — it is a serious co-creation platform where bright young minds collaborate to reimagine the future of life insurance. The winning ideas are evaluated for authenticity, scalability, relevance, and alignment with the evolving needs of our customers. Our internal domain experts will assess feasibility with the clear intent of adapting and implementing these solutions into real-world business and customer engagement strategies.

The initiative allows us to tap into fresh, future-ready perspectives from India's top B-schools, offering insights into the aspirations and behaviors of emerging consumer cohorts beyond Gen-X and millennials. By integrating their ideas, we not only accelerate innovation within the business but also ensure that our offerings remain relevant and empowering for tomorrow's customers.

Importantly, IdeationX is a direct expression of SBI Life's brand purpose — to liberate individuals to pursue their aspirations while ensuring the financial security of their loved ones. These young innovators are helping us reimagine scalable solutions that simplify insurance, enhance accessibility, and drive deeper engagement. At the same time, the platform fosters greater awareness of the life insurance sector among future leaders, building informed financial decision-makers and lasting brand affinity for SBI Life.

In the long run, IdeationX strengthens our position at the forefront of innovation in the life insurance industry, while staying true to our commitment of creating a financially secure and resilient India.

SBI Life rebranded in 2022 with the philosophy “Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye”. How has this refreshed identity shaped your communication approach and audience connection?

When we reimagined SBI Life in 2022, it was rooted in a key cultural insight that India is evolving into a society that is increasingly individualistic yet deeply collective. Consumers today aspire to carve their own paths, pursue passions, and embrace independence in thought – while still carrying with pride the responsibility of securing the well-being of their loved ones.

The brand philosophy, “Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye”, thus, captures this duality beautifully. It positions SBI Life not just as an insurer, but as an enabler – liberating individuals to pursue their aspirations with confidence, knowing that the financial needs of their families are well protected.

This philosophy has reshaped our communication approach. Instead of traditional, fear-led narratives, our narrative is anchored in empowerment and emotional authenticity. We showcase real, relatable life journeys where personal ambitions and family responsibilities coexist harmoniously. This shift has deepened our resonance with audiences, building trust and emotional affinity with both emerging and established consumer cohorts.

Ultimately, “Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye” has helped us transcend the image of being a financial service provider. It has repositioned SBI Life as a dependable life partner – one that stands by consumers in their pursuit of their individual passions, while safeguarding what matters most to them.

Campaigns like #DilBacchaTohSabAcha and Thanks-A-Dot have been widely appreciated. What’s your guiding principle for creating campaigns that strike both emotional and business impact?

At SBI Life, our guiding principle is to showcase stories that inspire and empower individuals, reflecting our philosophy of “Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye.” Both #DilBacchaTohSabAcha and Thanks-A-Dot exemplify this approach in different contexts yet are united by the same purpose: enabling people to live boldly while caring for those who matter most. The former brings to focus the unfiltered joy and curiosity of children, encouraging them to explore, dream, and express themselves freely. The latter empowers women with knowledge and tools for early breast cancer detection, enabling them to take charge of their health and well-being.

In both cases, the messaging is designed to give people the confidence and freedom to act, whether it’s pursuing aspirations or safeguarding their health, thereby reflecting our deeper purpose: helping individuals live with confidence while caring for those they love.

A memorable highlight of the Thanks-A-Dot initiative was when the Indian Women’s Cricket Team wore specially designed pink jerseys with the campaign logo during their ODI against Australia. This moment underscored how storytelling, sport, and social responsibility can converge to spark conversations, inspire action, and empower individuals.

Ultimately, our campaigns go beyond business objectives—they are a blend of emotional resonance, social impact, and the liberating spirit at the core of our brand: empowering people to live boldly and protect what matters most.

In an era of digital-first consumers, what key behavioural shifts are influencing your marketing and communication strategies today?

In the recent years, we have recognised that the digital landscape has transformed consumer expectations and behaviours. Today's consumers seek personalised, authentic, and seamless experiences across multiple platforms. To align with these expectations, we are leveraging advanced data analytics and AI to offer tailored insurance solutions that resonate with individual needs.

Moreover, we have observed an increased movement towards transparency and trustworthiness in brand communications. Consumers are increasingly getting drawn towards brands that demonstrate social responsibility and business ethics. In line with these expectations, we have launched some very innovative campaigns like, IdeationX, Hack-AI-thon, Spell Bee, etc. focused specifically on the younger consumers. These initiatives not only align well with our brand values but also foster a deeper connect with the masses.

You have worked across leading insurance brands before joining SBI Life. What unique lessons from those experiences continue to guide your leadership today?

My journey across leading brands has taught me four enduring lessons:

- **First, always place the customer at the core — in life insurance, empathy must guide every touchpoint, from product design to claim settlement.**
- Second, continuous innovation is non-negotiable in a sector as competitive as ours.
- Third, data is no longer a support function but the backbone of strategy, driving sharper insights and decisions.
- And finally, collaboration — with agents, partners, regulators, and tech players — is what truly powers sustainable growth. These lessons shape how we lead marketing and communications at SBI Life, ensuring our efforts remain empathetic, innovative, data-driven, and collaborative.

As a brand leader, how do you foster innovation and creativity within your teams to stay ahead in a highly competitive sector?

Innovation is a continuous mindset, not a one-time activity for us. As a marketer, my role is to create the right conditions — an environment that encourages experimentation, processes that channel diverse perspectives through collaboration, and a clear purpose that keeps us focused. Guided by our philosophy "Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye", every idea we nurture is designed to be meaningful, customer-centric, and impactful. By striking the right balance between freedom and focus, we foster creativity that keeps us ahead while delivering lasting value to our customers and society.

CSR is an integral part of your mandate. How do you align SBI Life's CSR initiatives with the brand's larger purpose of building trust and long-term value for society?

CSR is viewed as an extension of our core purpose of liberating individuals to pursue their dreams while securing the needs of their loved ones. It is not about compliance, but about creating lasting impact in areas like healthcare, education, environment, and especially livelihood.

We focus strongly on livelihood and skilling, as financial independence empowers families. In Chhattisgarh and Bihar, we work with over 4,500 beneficiaries, mostly women, to enhance incomes through agriculture and allied activities. Education is another pillar, and through our partnership with Parikrama Humanity Foundation in Karnataka, we support the formal education of over 450 underprivileged students, equipping them with opportunities on par with the best globally.

These initiatives ensure that our CSR efforts are not just impactful but also aligned with our brand purpose, creating conditions for individuals to thrive, pursue their aspirations, and secure a better future for themselves and their families.

With clear metrics to track outcomes, our CSR initiatives impacted over 53,000 lives in the past year. For us, CSR is about building societal trust and driving sustainable progress — proving that a brand is defined not just by its products, but by the positive difference it creates beyond business.