

# HUL Enters Red Light Zone for Red Label Ad

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**Mumbai:** For Hindustan Unilever, the way to a steaming hot cup of tea could well be through Kamathipura – Mumbai's red-light district. In an effort to break a social stigma, the country's largest consumer goods company has roped in a commercial sex worker to feature in an upcoming advertisement for Brooke Bond, capturing her experience with unassuming office-goers over a cup of tea.

The Indian unit of the Anglo-Dutch consumer giant put up a makeshift tea house a few weeks ago at Churchgate, one of the busiest stations in the city, and offered free cups of tea to commuters. The sex worker was filmed striking up conversations with people, especially the moments when she revealed the nature of her work. While many were taken aback, most were welcoming enough to break barriers over a cuppa.

"We don't want to be insensitive or provocative for the sake of being provocative. We are taking a deep-seated point of view on our brands and their role on society because they do," Sudhir Sitapati told ET in his first interview after becoming executive director of HUL's refreshments business, which was recently split from the foods segment. "We have seen evidence

that successful brands tend to be more purpose-driven and have a point of view in society."

Last year, Unilever said "brands with purpose" are growing at twice the speed of others in its portfolio. The parent company's turnover exceeded €53 billion in 2015, with 13 brands clocking sales of over €1 billion each.

In India, HUL has been trying to push brands such as Lifebuoy, Fair & Lovely and Dove by sourcing raw material sustainably, reducing the environmental footprint and increasing positive social impact.

Brooke Bond Red Label, which was launched in India in 1903, is retracing the footsteps of founder Arthur Brooke, who chose the name because it was his "bond" to customers, said HUL. Over the past few years, HUL has used off-beat campaigns to promote the brand. One ad featured a reluctant Hindu family becoming friends with a Muslim neighbour over a few cups of Red Label tea. Others touched taboo subjects such as live-in relationships. At Cannes this year, Unilever won a coveted Grand Prix for a Brooke Bond campaign that featured the country's first transgender band.

"If you just take a five-minute break, have a cup of tea with a perfect stranger, very quickly you strike up a conversation and can just warm people up. Tea is the best social lubricant," Sita-

pati said. Experts said breaking out of the mould completely is a courageous move by HUL.

"This is very, very out there, so there is a danger of backlash, for sure. But it depends on the manner in which it is done. The difference between the realities of who she is and the actual conversation was so big that its impact would be made," said Alpana Parida,

president at brand consultancy DY Works.

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believable."

With social message at the heart of the campaign, the company expects a sales boost, too, in the long term. Tea is consumed in almost 90% of the country, although per capita consumption is 0.63 kg compared with as much as 6.2 kg in the United Arab Emirates. HUL is the market leader in India's ₹10,000 crore tea market with brands including Lipton. Unlike other food and beverage segments that have been stagnant or declining over the past few quarters, tea has been relatively insulated with 8-9% growth annually.

## Social Message

HUL has rolled out several unconventional campaigns to promote Brooke Bond, which brand experts say is a courageous move

One such ad featured a Hindu family becoming friends with a Muslim neighbour over a few cups of tea

It has also touched taboo subjects such as live-in relationships

At Cannes this year, HUL won a Grand Prix for the Brooke Bond campaign that featured India's first transgender band



The Brooke Bond tea house at Churchgate station, Mumbai

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**SUDHIR SITAPATI**, Exec Director-Refreshments Business, HUL