

## BRAND TRACK

# The Problem of 'Purpose'



A conversation with HUL's executive director, **Priya Nair** on the plenty of and problems in purpose-led marketing

BY **DELSHAD IRANI** | MUMBAI

*Unilever, along with P&G, co-authored the book on how to transition to woke-brand status. Its "purpose-led brands" from Dove and Axe/Lynx to Surf Excel and Lifebuoy have been "unstereotyping" and attempting to affect positive change in society since well-before 'woke' entered popular lexicon and became the ad-hack of the modern marketer. A brand's wokeness is generally established with emotional pieces of communication that shake, shock or sadden us. Manage all and you've got a real winner that bumps up buzz and fattens bottom-lines.*

*Recently, HUL released a corporate campaign film titled 'Water' (created by Ogilvy & Mather India) to promote its 'Start A Little Good' CSR initiative. It shows us what happens when you place a shower-bath in a small, drought stricken village – the whole village can drink in the time it takes one city-dweller to shower. The film left many viewers shaken and some stirred enough to purchase buckets for bathing.*

*In a chat with Brand Equity, Priya Nair, executive director (home care), Hindustan Unilever, shares a personal anecdote. After watching the Water film her 15-year old daughter suggested the family buy buckets for bathing. While Nair is moved by people's emotional reactions to the film online, she says, "More important for me is the behaviour change I've started to hear in small, anecdotal ways around me. I find that is the ultimate goal in the end." Excerpts...*

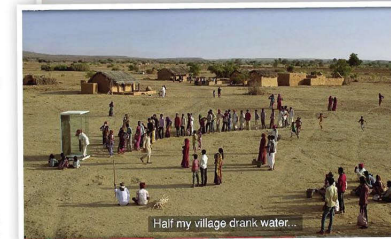
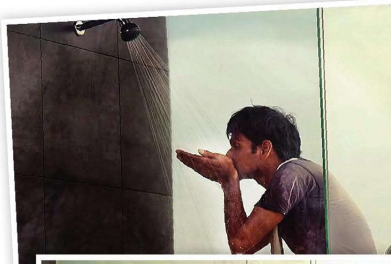
**What is the genesis of 'Start A Little Good' and how will HUL brands fit into the overarching narrative?**

The goal is to make sustainable living commonplace. We want to provoke thought and encourage little actions to make a big difference. Given our scale, size and reach it's the right thing for us to do.

We aren't coming from a space of brands (for Start A Little Good). But our brands fit in because we are a company whose products are absolutely linked to water. From the time a person brushes their teeth in the morning to time for tea, shower and washing clothes and dishes, they are all about water. We have a strong link to water. Water conservation is a larger crisis for our country. If our citizens and country are not going to be in good shape then our brands are not going to be in good shape either.

**Keeping in mind that today practically every major consumer brand has a cause/purpose it's latched on to, and a degree of cynicism and disdain that has crept in among viewers, what are the inherent challenges in crafting purpose-led campaigns?**

You have to have the authenticity to carry off such a piece of communication. In this case, there was a larger social message. But take a brand that has a social mission, it's important that the social cause is singularly linked to the product and what the brand does. When we walk too far away from the line of category and where the brand operates, authenticity becomes the challenge. And that's often the criticism brands get. The other aspect is the way you communicate. So, it's who you are and how you do it. It has been crafted carefully and thoughtfully.



Half my village drank water...

**PURPOSE-LED MARKETING GETS FLAK WHEN YOU WALK TOO FAR AWAY FROM THE LINE OF CATEGORY AND WHERE THE BRAND OPERATES**

**From what we've seen as recently as the Nike case, there's certainly a business case for purpose-driven marketing.**

If we want to be relevant in the world it's critical that we create a larger platform, a purpose for which brands exist. But it has to be absolutely linked to where the brand comes from. The business case is very clear. Our purpose-driven brands grow faster and stronger than those that are not yet on that journey. Unilever has been way ahead on the journey of creating purposeful brands. I would encourage

all brands to be thoughtful but in a manner in which they make real difference on the ground, are authentic about the purpose and stay with it. There should be a consistency of what you drive. Too often the reason why brands get flak is because they don't stay the course of a cause they pick up. A social mission of a brand is not something you can achieve in a year.

**Does consistency of brand also depend on the people driving these initiatives from within?**

At HUL we've been blessed with talent that stays. People who have grown with the brands. I think that's very powerful because then there's a real passion and insight that marketers develop when they work and grow with brands. There's a lot to be said on the point of continuity of people being linked to consistency of brand.

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