

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Over 2.5 billion people across the world use Unilever products every day. So when the FMCG juggernaut's global chief digital and marketing officer, **Conny Braams**, says that she wants Unilever brands "to be a part of culture and shape culture" the scale and complexity of such a mission is enormous. Last month, the world's second-largest advertiser shared its new goals toward building a sustainable and more inclusive future for its people, business and brands. It also includes renewed commitments to purge advertising of harmful stereotypes and to promote more inclusive representation of people in its advertising.

In an exclusive interview with **Brand Equity's Delshad Irani**, Braams, a three-decade Unilever veteran, talks about the dual nature of Value, the power of purpose in growing brands and bottom-lines, and creating a future where sustainable choices are not a privilege.

Edited for length and clarity.

In your view, how has the fundamental relationship between brands and customers changed? We hear marketers say "everything has changed forever." Has it?

It's not changed in a pivoting way. It has evolved. The way that we shop, discover, entertain and just lead our lives - digital has become an integral part of it all. The other element that's important for us is that people are becoming more conscious, cautious and considerate. I think the consciousness of wanting to take a stand and wanting to be part of the solution has really been rising over the past year. These two shifts we then obviously see reflected in brands and the way that our brands portray themselves.

How did last year's advertising "pause" on social media platforms in the US serve the company and its brands?

Our pause of advertising was basically focused on the US only, and we paused advertising in all major social media because we felt our brands were not safe in the environment that social media was providing. Due to that pause, we got into even more debates and discussions. We had a common issue to deal with. The platforms also want to provide a safe environment for our brands and to stop misinformation. We've collectively come up with 11

definitions of things we want to avoid happening on social media.

Since January, we have slowly come back to using social media because we were happy with the progress we have made, but not completely satisfied yet. There's always room for continuous improvement.

What role will traditional media play in brand building going forward?

What we will see is a merge of brand marketing and performance marketing. When you use digital next to your traditional media, normally it reinforces each other. The effectiveness of landing that message increases.

Unilever is in business for the long run. We're not building brands for short term gains. Of course, you need to stay very agile in the way that you confront the newest trends, but we are in it for the long run. We will continue using different media depending on the jobs to be done.

Brand power is the only significant measure that counts. It is a good indicator of long-term growth and long-term success because it builds penetration and it builds market share.

We're very cognizant of the environment in which we build our brands. Our brands are always there

THE FUTURE-READY CMO

'WE WANT TO BE A PART OF CULTURE & WE WANT TO SHAPE CULTURE'

In conversation with **Conny Braams**, chief digital and marketing officer, **Unilever**

IT IS ABOUT VALUE AND VALUES. FOR OUR BRANDS, THE DUAL NATURE OF VALUE WILL BE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN THE FUTURE

Purpose can be polarising. What happens when brands face a backlash for supporting a cause?

We want our brands to have a point of view and to strive for something better in society. And these could be things that are very relevant to you or things that are not so relevant for you at this moment in time that might become more relevant over time.

We are not afraid. We want to be a beacon for diversity and inclusion. So you'll see that portrayed in many of our brands. And yes, that is not something that everybody would like to be part of. But that's the consequence of having a purpose and wanting to strive for it. I am convinced, over time, we will get people over the line, but probably not everyone.

Like Dove, Fair & Lovely (now Glow & Lovely) also found its purpose much later in life.

The brand had transitioned quite a bit on the basis of what our beliefs are within Unilever. Last year, we changed the name and we had a big advertising campaign to really show to the world that we have moved on and we have evolved. That is life, isn't it? So, even though brands might have started from a different perspective, we want to be part of culture and we want to shape culture. The current expression of the brand is much more contemporary and fitting in the current culture as we see it. We'll see that happening with more brands.

What's the next level? Is it making sure that sustainable choices don't become a privilege?

If we can make sustainable living commonplace, only then we've got a real possibility to change something in the world.

The next step in our journey is to really make sure that whenever you're on your path to purchase that sustainability is one of the dimensions you take into consideration. And then it's made very simple for you to choose the most sustainable alternative that is always also combined with a superior product at the right value equation. So making sustainable choices affordable and simple is the next step.

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To read or watch the full interview, log on to ETBrandEquity.com



COMPANIES WITH PURPOSE LAST, PEOPLE WITH PURPOSE THRIVE AND BRANDS WITH PURPOSE GROW



(L-R): Dove's Courage Is Beautiful, Ben & Jerry's - one of the most vocal brands in the Black Lives Matter movement and an ad for Brooke Bond Red Label-2021 #Unstereotype award-winner

for value and values. That is the reason why consumers buy brands. It is for the value they provide and for the values they offer. To portray these you can use whatever media that is available. It will always be a mix of traditional and digital media and the two can actually realise one plus one is three, at least.

How are you making Unilever a future-ready marketing company?

We know that the dual nature of value

will be of even more importance in the future. It is important to look at the price architecture, the value proposition a brand offers, and to help in times that we have more cash-strapped consumers. But values are equally important.

In the end, to have a future-fit brand we need to make sure it has a really well defined purpose and is able to continue to communicate its purpose in a creative and entertaining way. It all starts with being clear on the value and the values the brand offers.

To make us future fit we're upskilling all our marketers and taking away the complexity that we have built into marketing and coming back to the basics.

What happens if a brand can't find a social or environmental purpose? Is there a possibility of culling brands based on this factor?

I haven't seen the proof of that yet. The easiest brands that we always refer to are Ben & Jerry's, Seventh Generation and Lifebuoy which were built upon a purpose. They were born with a purpose. But Dove was never born that way. It was later that we found the purpose of Dove and we started to portray unstereotypical