

Going by the BrandZ framework, how does being meaningful, different and salient apply to HUL brands?

At the heart of great brands is a purpose that goes beyond mere functionality. Our brands have a well-defined purpose that enables them to bring to life an idea that resonates emotionally with the people they serve. When a brand is built with a unique purpose that traverses the emotional space in the consumer's mind, delivers the promise of functionality and is consistent in its communication, you end up creating a strong, well differentiated brand that has a meaningful impact on the people and community it serves.

Could you give us an insight into maintaining trust in the face of vastly accelerated competition, often powered by deep discounting?

One of the best quotes I've heard is from my boss Paul Polman: "Trust comes on foot but leaves on horseback." The competitive advantage has moved from "what we do" to "how we do what we do". Trust is based on purpose, functionality and consistency. Price is a great indicator of the strength of a brand. When consumers buy, they don't merely buy a product but rather buy into an idea as well. Which means you need to elevate brands from being a mere commodity to something that builds a connection between your company and the consumers. Building purpose helps us to build trust. Simply put, when you have purpose deeply rooted in brand identity, it enables your brands to have stronger price elasticity.

IN PURPOSE WE TRUST

With a staggering seven brands in the BrandZ ranking, HUL is obviously doing many things right. CMD Sanjiv Mehta gives Brand Equity a few insights. **By Ravi Balakrishnan**

Premiumisation has traditionally been associated with personal care or food products. But what does a detergent, for instance, need to offer, to command a premium and how do you communicate this?

We have brands meeting different needs at different price points. There's Wheel that offers a basic clean; Rin which is all about whiteness; Surf Excel which is about stain removal; the Matics which are suited to machine wash; liquids which give you better sensorials and then adjacent categories like fabric conditioners which not just take care of the clothes but make them soft and fragrant.

The interesting thing is our biggest brand is Surf Excel and it goes to one in 10 households. As the country evolves, and people have more disposable income, they look for higher order benefits and not just the basic clean. But great brands are not built purely on functionality. That's where purpose comes in.

One of our best stories is Dirt is Good. It stemmed from an insight that one of the biggest things that worries a mother is her child's development. Dirt is Good stems from the philosophy that you should let children blossom: play, and get

dirty. The message to mothers is 'Don't worry, Surf Excel will take care of the dirt and stains.' It manifests in many ways. For instance, two years back, in a wonderful commercial where a little boy lends his footwear to a player on his football team who can't afford shoes. It's a great story; not just about laundry cleaning, but getting the child ready for life.

The latest campaign gets into the space of Haar ko Harao. India is very competitive and people invariably look at success and failure as opposites. We are making people understand failure is a part of life that you need to go through to be successful. This goes back to something deeper than simple detergent powder. That is how you make a great brand.

Fundamental human values cut across geopolitical boundaries and that's what purpose does.

To give you another example: Thomas Brooke who created Brooke Bond 100 years ago, talked about bringing people together over a great cup of tea. And we are living up to that promise even today, manifesting in very different ways. Over the last few years, we've addressed live-in relationships, the band of transgendered people and our latest: about a Muslim sculptor making Ganesha idols.

The blend has to be great, but what Brooke Bond is telling you is that a wonderful cup of tea can break barriers, solve differences and help people live amicably, with different perspectives.

Do all your brands necessarily need to have a purpose. Some like Vaseline for instance, don't seem to have this articulated as clearly as the others

It goes back to the philosophy of the organisation. We always challenge ourselves. There are some brands where there is a very distinctive purpose clearly and overtly identifiable by the consumer. There are others where we have to do a bit more work, in our quest to make the brand distinctive. Since brands evolve, you go through that journey. I love Vaseline as a brand: when it comes to skincare there are few brands that do such an amazing job. But if you, as my consumer, are not getting the purpose as clearly as we'd like, maybe we need to discuss how to make it stronger.

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Chairman & MD, Hindustan Unilever

