

A DAWN MEDIA PUBLICATION ON IDEAS AND MARKETING APPROACHES



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ON THE COVER

LOOKING GOOD IN TIMES OF STRESS

Despite the rising cost of living, Pakistanis are adopting a whole new approach in their choice of beauty and personal care brands.



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JUST SAYING

It almost seems like a quiet revolution. The way Pakistanis have altered their approach to their personal and beauty care regimes. And this applies to both women and men. Gone are the days of single product usage, the choice driven either by the habitual or by what is easy to find or easy to afford. Today, Pakistani women and men are not only aware of the products that are available to them, they have become selective in their choices, their decisions to buy no longer motivated by glossy advertisements that promise an overnight change in their appearance and therefore in their lives. Rather, they are taking charge of what they buy and use by listening to what influencers are talking about and by asking pertinent questions about the suitability of a particular product in terms of their own specific requirements.

What has brought about this change? Social media of course. Social media in terms of raising awareness and also in terms of facilitating the burgeoning of niche beauty and personal care businesses able to compete with the established brands by providing affordable solutions. The other important factor at play is the fact that the formulations are no longer necessarily patented, but are made available to would-be manufacturers with the agility to pivot from one formulation to another as trends change. Then there is the Gen Z effect, which prizes what is authentic and natural above all else, and which is also prone to greater gender fluidity, making it even more acceptable for men to turn their attention to skin and hair care products.

Propelling these trends is a cohort of influencers ready to engage with their audiences and enter into deeper level conversations about what they should use and how to use it to maximum effect. Influencers have become an almost irresistible force in providing information and advice on how to navigate the quantum of choices that are becoming available both on and offline.

The best part about this sea change is that the tyranny of the fairness cream seems to be in retreat. Fairness may, in certain segments, unfortunately remain a beauty standard, but with the conversation moving to skin types and tones, the emphasis is moving towards working with products that actually deliver on the promise to nurture our overall well-being.

A question that remains to be resolved is that of standards and quality control, and like most things in Pakistan, be it food, pharmaceuticals or any agent that impacts our health, the regulatory authority, in this case, the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA), is not performing to optimum capacity, leaving room for substandard products that may contain toxic chemicals. However, in this regard, the previous government has approved a draft bill aimed at setting up the Pakistan General Cosmetics Authority (PGCA) under the Ministry of Science and Technology. Although the draft bill is primarily aimed at weeding out counterfeit products, it is hoped that it will regulate the formulations used in manufacturing local products. However, even if the bill is passed, this will still remain a hope rather than a reality, pending concrete action.

Nevertheless, and despite the gloomy economic climate, the beauty and personal care category is flourishing. It is now seen as part and parcel of a movement that encapsulates physical fitness, work-life balance, good sleep hygiene and a healthy diet. Beauty and personal care has graduated from being a vanity project to becoming an essential component of an overarching wellness-oriented lifestyle. And that is a very good thing. ■

FEEDBACK

Interview with M. Raza Pirbhail, CEO, KFC

Being a Xennial or someone amongst old people having a global palette, I would request MRP to reintroduce the original recipe with mash n' gravy on the side or their original chicken with infused Tabasco. They should definitely reintroduce the world-famous gravy and not the one that they tested using Knorr soup but real gravy and the famous chicken bowl that comprises corn, mash, gravy and chicken chunks. Not asking him to introduce this in every branch but specific branches like the ones in DHA, PECHS or SMCHS.

Sunny

Interview with Dr Miftah Ismail, former Finance Minister of Pakistan

Miftah Ismail is so clear about the problems and gives very practical solutions. But the real problem is that no one listens to sane voices in Pakistan!

Raza

Can Pakistan Become a Market of Tomorrow?

A well-articulated piece! Embracing sectors like agri-tech, renewables, and the Orange Economy, alongside transparency and start-up support could propel Pakistan towards a promising global economic presence. As a concerned well-wisher, I'm eager to see these strategies unfold for a brighter future by the decision-makers of Pakistan. Any policy should be implemented at the grassroots level if authorities want fruitful outcomes.

Zubair

Still Beleaguered

Pakistan's auto sector's only solution is to go for Made in Pakistan, no more CKD or CBU units; the auto sector must pool its resources and make standards for manufacturing common components. Engineering and technology must be shared across different platforms for common use components.

Kamran Choudhri

Burp

Great culinary experience!

Integrity

A Slow Scroll Into Addiction

Not only the kids, but elders, everyone is addicted to some social media activity. For information, knowledge, education, awareness, it's good but engaging with social media for a longer duration beyond one hour is injurious to eye health and brain health.

Mass Views

Winning Gold for Pakistan

The Pakistani education system does very little to encourage creativity.

M. Emad

Every day, I'm (not) hustling

In life, what makes us happy the most is of utmost importance. "I quit my nine-to-five to become a full-time content creator." Well said. Riffat Rashid is now living a truly stress-free life spending quality time with her mother too.

Jamil Soomro

And what do you think? aurora@dawn.com

We reserve the right to edit letters for reasons of clarity and space.



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Looking Good in Times of Stress

Mamun M. Adil examines how beauty and personal care (BPC) brands are adapting their strategies to meet the changing expectations of their increasingly cost-sensitive and well-informed consumer base.

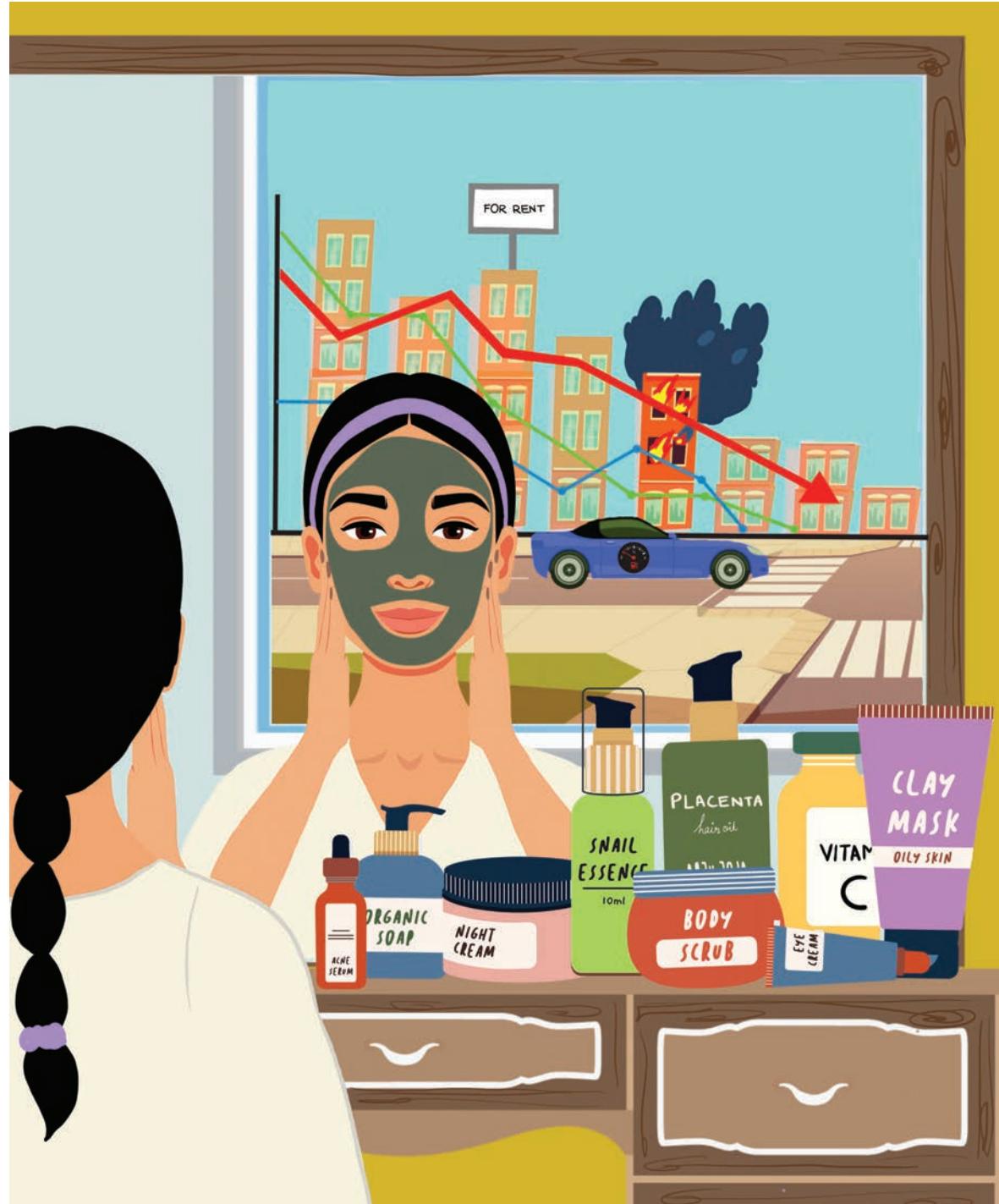
Audrey Hepburn, the eternal style icon, continues to elicit people's interest around the world nearly 70 years after the release of her most popular films. Fashion and lifestyle publications continue to unearth details about her, particularly the beauty and personal care (BPC) products she used and the regimes she adhered to. For example, a recent article in *Vogue* titled *11 Things To Know About Audrey Hepburn's Beauty Regime* reveals that like Marilyn Monroe, Grace Kelly and Ava Gardner, Hepburn used to consult Hungarian dermatologist Ern László, whose skincare line exists to this day.

The name of the lipstick brand Hepburn wore in the iconic cab scene in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* remains a mystery. In the film, she plays the free-spirited Holly Golightly, who upon learning of a potentially distressing note, declares: "A girl can't read that sort of thing without her lipstick," and promptly applies it. While Revlon insists it is their Pink in the Afternoon, others believe it was manufactured by Estée Lauder or Burberry and several news articles and blogs have devoted articles to deciphering which lipstick Hepburn used. This fascination with Hepburn's lipstick shade and personal care preferences is no doubt a testament to her legacy and also highlights the role of the BPC sector in the lives of many women.

Because It's Worth It

According to Statista, the global BPC sector is worth \$579.2 billion and is predicted to increase at a 3.53% annual rate. The United States (\$92.79 billion), China (\$60.17 billion), Japan (\$41.88 billion), India (\$27.77 billion) and Brazil (\$23.45 billion) are the top five countries in terms of BPC market share. Two of these countries are Pakistan's neighbours, India and China; the other two are Bangladesh (\$9.87 billion) and Afghanistan, for which data is unavailable. Pakistan's BPC value is anticipated to be \$4.62 billion, with a 2.35% increase expected over the next five years. Personal care is the largest segment, accounting for 49% of the entire sector (\$2.28 billion).

According to a report by Euromonitor titled *Beauty and Personal Care in Pakistan*, Pakistan's BPC market's value has more than doubled (it climbed by 102.3%) and in the last six years it has been valued at Rs 173.8 billion and Rs 341.4 billion in 2017 and 2022 respectively. (Because of the rupee's devaluation over the last year and likely differences in the methodologies used by Euromonitor and Statista, estimating their values in the same currency would be difficult. It is also worth noting that Pakistan's BPC sector is unregulated, and its value could therefore be substantially larger.)



Euromonitor further states that five MNCs constitute over 53% of Pakistan's overall BPC market: Unilever (24.9%), P&G (13.5%), Colgate-Palmolive (7.6%), Reckitt Pakistan (3.8%) and L'Oréal (3.4%). The remaining 46.8% comprises Healeon, Gelersdorg AG, Johnson & Johnson, Society Bic and Medora of London (in order of their market share) as well as "others" which make up 26.7%.

The "others" category possibly includes legacy brands like Hashmi, Kala Kola, Saeed Ghani, Swiss Miss, Tibet, Olivia, and newer brands that have recently either been established or grown in popularity, such as B&B Derma, Conatural, Hemani, HERBeauty, Lurella, Lush Cosmetics, Le Pur, Illynn, or the likes of Faiza, Nisab and Stillman's creams. Some of these brands continue to have a strong following, especially in non-urban areas which constitute consumers who may have the same spending power as their urban counterparts but are more price-sensitive, less well-informed and less brand loyal.

A Cosmetic Change?

One of the most notable recent developments in Pakistan's BPC sector is the establishment of the Pakistan General Cosmetics Regulatory Authority (PGCRA), which will fall under the administrative control of the Ministry of Science and Technology. PGCRA was established via 'The Pakistan General Cosmetic Bill, 2023' which was passed in July 2023 by the existing government at the time. It states that PGCRA "aims to govern various aspects of general cosmetics, including quality, standards, labelling, packaging, manufacturing, storage, distribution, and sales... this measure is designed to ensure that consumers have access to safe and reliable cosmetic products while maintaining transparency and accountability throughout the cosmetic industry."

Although it is too early to tell how effective PGCRA will be, and what role the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA)

will play in overseeing the cosmetics sector, the reaction to the Bill from several industry stakeholders in the BPC sector has been primarily positive because many of them believe it is time for Pakistan to adopt the global practice of having a governing body that solely addresses the difficulties that the BPC sector faces. According to an industry insider, the Bill is a big improvement over a previous version, which specified that the BPC sector will be governed by the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), which is in charge of pharmaceutical regulation.

What remains unclear about the Bill – apart from the PSQCA's future function – is how the Ministry of Science and Technology will ensure that the quality of cosmetics adheres to global standards. This is important because PSQCA has previously not done a thorough job of regulating the industry in terms of enforcing quality standards and addressing the sector's primary concerns and challenges.



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- Absorbs pus and fluid
- Hides under make up



Blemishes to Cover

These concerns include the availability of counterfeit and low-quality items, such as dangerous whitening creams that contain mercury and pose health dangers to users and the environment. Furthermore, similar items are imported from different countries, particularly China and according to Myra Khan, CEO of Conatural, "It is common knowledge that China uses Pakistan as a dumping ground for makeup products that do not meet the quality standards of its own and other countries. These pose significant health risks."

Here, it is important to mention that although the purchase of imported products has been affected owing to the economy, volumes have increased, particularly for products that enter the country through the grey market. However, their costs have risen and this has opened up opportunities for local businesses, especially given the prevalent 'buy Pakistani' mindset among consumers.

Khan and other stakeholders also mention other concerns expressed by brands operating in Pakistan, primarily the fact that it is increasingly difficult to obtain imported raw materials at consistent rates, as well as the challenges of skyrocketing petrol prices and electricity costs, not to mention overall inflationary pressures. As a result, these variables have decreased profit margins for industry participants, a state of affairs compounded by the fact that consumer spending has decreased, especially among the lower SECs.

Beauty Spots

Despite the challenges, the BPC sector has grown substantially in the last five years and although the rate of growth is lower compared to most countries, it is undeniably on a consistent upward trajectory – or in the words of an industry insider, it is "exploding." This expansion is due to different variables, many of them connected to the Covid-19 pandemic, which sparked a higher interest in personal care, self-care and general wellness among consumers. In the words of Sidra Afzal, Digital Marketing and Partnerships Lead, Saeed Ghani, "Consumers have become more aware that skincare is an important component of their overall well-being and this has been critical to our growth."

Rising urbanisation and population expansion in Pakistan have also seen a shift in lifestyles, with city dwellers looking for a wider selection of BPC goods to meet their needs. Along with increasing urbanisation, internet penetration has increased and more customers have access to online shopping platforms, thereby increasing their awareness about BPC products.

Hand in hand with this is the increase in direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands for brands like Conatural and their emergence has disrupted traditional distribution channels. According to Khan, "These brands often offer specialised

products that attract a younger demographic who prefer to shop online." She adds that consumers are turning to online shopping for their BPC products due to the convenience of online platforms, which tend to have a wider product selection, plus the fact that would-be buyers can compare prices and read reviews online.

There has also been a rise in the use of natural BPC products globally and Pakistan is no exception, especially considering that Pakistanis have relied on *desi* ingredients and *totkas* as part of their beauty regimes since time immemorial. This is evidenced by the increasing emergence (and re-emergence) of natural, organic, and sustainable BPC brands, be it Aura Crafts, Conatural, Hemani, Nirvana Botanics or Saeed Ghani. This trend is one of the reasons why Hemani (established in 1899) chose to enter Pakistan in 2016. Prior to this date, they were focused on export markets in the Middle East, Europe and North America.

As Zohair Hemani, Director, Hemani Group, explains, "Organic products were gaining traction globally and this was always our strength. When we saw the trend catching on in Pakistan, we decided to enter the market."

Hemani have 45 outlets in 16 cities and their portfolio includes lines of celebrities such as Waseem Badami and Ayesha Omar. Their portfolio is spread over 1,200 products across six categories including skincare, personal care, healthcare, essential oils and fragrances. Similarly, Saeed Ghani has benefitted from the organic boom. They have over 100 outlets across Pakistan and have introduced new natural products.

The men's grooming segment too has undergone significant expansion and has made a substantial contribution to the BPC sector and brands catering to this demographic have witnessed substantial growth. Although women tend to dominate this market (approximately 90-95%), there has been a noteworthy increase in the number of men displaying an interest in skincare, haircare and grooming products, particularly among the younger generation.

According to Hemani, products like facewashes and hair and face mists have gained popularity among men, especially among those who use bikes to commute and use these products after reaching their workplaces or attending meetings. This practice helps them to freshen up after being exposed to the pollution on the roads. Consequently, there has been an increase in the number

of brands catering to men such as Daari Mookh and Nabila's Zero Makeup which cater to men as well as women.

Expand, Diversify and Strategise

To cater to these new trends, BPC businesses have had to implement a number of strategies, including putting greater emphasis on increasing localisation, particularly for MNCs, introducing loyalty programmes, expanding their product portfolios with more SKUs to broaden their reach to lower SECs and providing customised products in line with their consumers' evolving needs.

This has led to constant product innovation for Conatural, including the introduction of organic and natural components, cruelty-free products, and personalised skincare solutions. Saeed Ghani has followed suit to cater to specific skincare needs, and Afzal says that the brand recently introduced a full range of Vitamin C products in response to consumer demand for skincare solutions that brighten and rejuvenate the skin. "Whether it's herbal products, skincare essentials, or specialised treatments, our offerings consistently attract positive attention and reinforce our brand's reputation for quality and innovation."

Qawi Naseer, Country Manager, L'Oréal reinforces this (see his interview on page 13). "Over the last five years, consumers have been seeking personalised, clean and sustainable products that align with their values. L'Oréal has adapted to these trends with diverse product offerings, a commitment to sustainability and a focus on self-expression, resulting in increased sales, loyalty, and engagement."

Branding Personal Care

In terms of marketing and advertising BPC products, conventional mediums such as TV, print, and OOH are important, particularly in targeting specific demographics, although digital appears to be the dominant channel for urban customers. As a result, many brands demonstrate their commitment to goals such as sustainability and diversity by engaging in content marketing through videos, tutorials and events conducted by notable dermatologists and using influencers.

For example, Saeed Ghani organises events as a means to engage with their audience directly and for Afzal, these go beyond mere product showcases to serve as platforms for education and interaction and include workshops and seminars on skincare and self-care routines. They are also venturing into influencer collaborations to connect with their audience more effectively. Khan seconds this, saying that for Conatural, "celebrity endorsements and social media influencers play a significant role in promoting BPC products. Many consumers are influenced by celebrities and the influencers they follow on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube."

Given that the majority of the advertising is increasingly conducted on digital, the corresponding budgets have increased due to the rupee's devaluation, as well as the fact that influencers are now charging significantly more than they did five to 10 years ago. The approach of the messaging has also changed in keeping with the fact that for many people the perception of what personal care is has also evolved. According to Naseer, L'Oréal's target audience now has an "increased awareness of diversity, inclusivity, and self-expression, and people are embracing a wider range of body types, ethnicities, and gender identities, leading to a more inclusive beauty standard." This is why we see many brands – local and international – focusing on concepts such as individuality, diversity and sustainability, self-confidence and empowerment in their communication.

A Picture Perfect Outlook?

Ultimately, despite the challenges, the BPC sector's rise remains favourable as it continues to focus on product innovation, customisation, diversity and sustainability, and makes active efforts to cater to the specific needs of an increasingly informed consumer base. However, factors such as the current economic situation and currency exchange rates, as well as a lack of oversight, may continue to impact the sector negatively. This could of course be remedied if the newly established PGCRA takes a proactive approach to regulating the sector and addressing the challenges related to low-quality, substandard and counterfeit products. ■





The Beauty of Self-Discovery

Muhammad Ali Khan on how personal care brands have evolved their messaging.

The beauty business has been in existence since 'forever' and most notably in Ancient Egyptian culture in one form or another. Today, of course, the personal care category makes up a large part of the consumer packaged goods industry, where brands are often sold with the claim that they will improve or protect skin health and by implication, make it look better, smoother, cleaner and so on. Although this particular approach has been working for decades, consumers today are much more aware of the ingredients contained in such products and their production process. They know what to look for and whether these claims can be validated or not, giving rise to a new generation of consumers who ask more questions. As a result, today personal care brands could be at risk of becoming irrelevant unless they change their narrative and substantiate their claims.

1 Connecting through self-love: Personal care brands have realised that to maintain a positive perception they need to echo the voice of their consumers – and this means no longer leveraging the perceived physical insecurities of their consumers and moving towards a more self-embracing narrative. Dove, of course, was one of the first brands to do this with their 'Real Beauty' campaign that featured diversity and inclusivity and celebrated beauty in all its forms. Dove's recent 'Reverse Selfie' campaign has furthered a narrative they began 15 years ago. The campaign addresses young women and the prevailing obsession to use filters in order to enhance their appearance. The campaign asks them to love themselves and work on their self-esteem.

Many brands have followed in Dove's footsteps, with varying degrees of success. Unilever renamed Glow & Lovely (formerly Fair & Lovely) but then faced a backlash amidst protests about racial discrimination in the US, while in India, Hindustan Unilever was criticised for continuing to build unrealistic beauty standards and stereotyping skin tones. The brand has now managed to move into a politically-correct zone although its visualisation is still not as inclusive as some consumers may expect. Then there is Rihanna who when launching Fenty Beauty was careful to represent people from diverse backgrounds and offer inclusive products (40 shades of foundation) for all skin tones. MAC Cosmetics have developed a new theme based on: 'All Ages, All Races, All Genders' and L'Oréal have launched their 'Your Skin, Your Story' campaign. It is interesting to note that



all these brands have moved from functional, results-based messaging to an emotion-based one in order to secure a place in their consumer's hearts.

2 Changing the benefit set: When developing the brand strategy for a product or company, the offering and the consumer benefits that come with it are two of the most important things to obtain clarity on. Given that most personal care brands have stressed on the idea of 'self-improvement' and 'betterment', they usually rely on benefits drawn directly from beauty standards. However, bucking this trend, CoverGirl developed an 'anti-narrative' stance by featuring in their campaign for their TruBlend foundation, a 69-year-old woman as well as a woman suffering from vitiligo, under the motto of: 'I am what I make up'. Initiatives such as these may not highlight the strongest points of the brand's functionality, but they do make space for greater brand

love. When brands are able to connect with consumers at such an intimate level, they significantly increase their chances of remaining top-of-mind – a feat every brand is out to achieve. This is an especially important asset in the customer's path to purchase as, according to a study conducted by IRI Worldwide in 2020, 90% of personal care purchases are still made at brick-and-mortar stores – despite the fact that online media influence 77% of retail decisions.

3 Celebrating the ordinary: Celebrating the everyday hero is an important aspect of this evolving narrative. Personal care brands are increasingly shifting their focus from unattainable beauty ideals to the celebration of authenticity and the power of individual self-expression. By acknowledging the beauty of everyday life, these brands empower ordinary people to shine in their own unique ways. They celebrate real-life stories,

encouraging people to embrace the quirks, imperfections and distinctive qualities that make each person extraordinary.

By connecting with consumers at a deeper, emotional level and challenging conventional beauty norms, brands are able to secure a special place in the hearts of their audience and embed themselves in each person's unique journey of self-discovery. These brands recognise that it's not only about product benefits but about fostering genuine connections and championing personal narratives; connections that keep these brands at the forefront of their consumer's mind during their path to purchase journey.

It's no longer just skin-deep; it's about touching hearts and minds. ■

Muhammad Ali Khan is AVP/Manager Communications at JS Bank. He has previously served as Associate Director Strategy & Creative at Synergy Dentsu and Spectrum VMLY&R.



"As market leaders, our overall vision is to develop and set the pace"

Qawi Naseer, Country Managing Director, L'Oréal Pakistan, speaks to Mamun M. Adil about the evolution of the beauty category.

MAMUN M. ADIL: What prompted your decision to join L'Oréal in 2020?

QAWI NASEER: I moved to L'Oréal as GM during the early days of the pandemic, a time when hardly anyone was changing jobs; rather, they were holding on to the ones they had. I decided to enter the beauty category because I wanted to be part of an agile and entrepreneurial organisation where I could be more in control of the strategic direction of the business.

MMA: What were some of the learnings you gained during this period?

QN: The fact that L'Oréal is developing Pakistan's beauty category. The category has really not advanced in the last decade; it is fragmented and largely comprises basic haircare or skincare products. L'Oréal has introduced new products into the market, be they serums or tissue masks, and they have really taken off. Serums have become a huge category, a fact no one could have predicted five years ago and we are now launching more products. As market leaders, our overall vision is to develop and set the pace for the market.

MMA: Who are your competitors?

QN: Our competition comes from established players and they include the multinational companies (many have been here for decades) when it comes to soap and shampoos. This said, there is no single national player that is working on category development in terms of makeup, although there are a lot of imported products coming in, including through the grey channels. We wish that there was more competition because it helps the category grow. Unlike some organisations that are importing and selling products, we are investing in educating consumers about our products and about beauty care in general. We do this through influencers and other avenues.

MMA: Who is L'Oréal's target audience and how do price points affect them?

QN: Our range of products spans several price points. For example, our mascaras range from Rs 600 to Rs 2,500 in order to ensure accessibility to different SECs. This said, I met a woman from SEC D in Lahore who was using Sky High, one of our most expensive mascaras that retails at Rs 2,500 (unbranded ones cost Rs 100 or 200). She said she uses Sky High for special occasions such as weddings and intends to make it last for a couple of years (she uses unbranded mascara on other days). We do not compromise on product



quality to manage our pricing and although our primary TGs are SECs A and B, the more we localise, the more we will be able to penetrate across all SECs.

MMA: What consumer trends have you noticed over the years?

QN: Consumers have become more demanding. The number of products in the skincare category that cater to specific needs has grown considerably, and this also goes for our lipsticks and nail polish shades. Five to 10 years ago, our lipstick shades were mostly reds; we now have nudes, blues and other colours which are more popular among younger audiences. Men's grooming has also evolved and a lot more men are looking for products that address their skincare, hair colouration and haircare needs and this was not the case 10 years ago. However, there are not many skincare products solely targeted at men and it is a category that we plan to develop. For the moment, men mostly use women's products for their skincare.

MMA: How has the perception of beauty changed over time?

QN: Beauty does not adhere to standards set by any organisation or brand. Beauty is a personal choice of self-expression, especially among younger audiences (for example,

colouring their hair) and aligns with their personality, values, comfort level and the way they want to express themselves. As a result, we have evolved not only our product offerings, we have evolved the way we market them by providing personalised solutions, as the definition of beauty is no longer uniform. Society is accepting this change, especially SECs A and B, and the conversation is starting in SECs C and D.

MMA: What would you attribute this to?

QN: Ten to 20 years ago, people were more conformist. Gen Z are changing this by questioning everything around them. They ask themselves questions such as: "Do I need to conform to a particular standard of beauty?" or "Should I be more comfortable with who I am?". In contrast, Millennials were less vocal about such things. Gen Z have a lot more information, which leads them to question belief systems. They also raise concerns about sustainability and environmental impacts.

MMA: Are Pakistani Gen Zers really very concerned about sustainability?

QN: Sustainability in Pakistan is picking up. Is it a trending topic among Gen Z? Probably not as much as it globally is, but it is beginning to matter. For L'Oréal as a group, sustainability is an

important issue and we take it very seriously. It comes under our overarching purpose which is to 'Create the Beauty That Moves the World' and consists of five pillars that include Sustainability, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Women Empowerment.

MMA: What issues do you address through 'Create the Beauty That Moves the World'?

QN: We tackle environmental concerns by reducing carbon emissions and water wastage, using sustainable packaging material, supporting communities and hiring people from diverse backgrounds, be they differently abled or from less privileged backgrounds. It is about equity, not equality. From the women's empowerment perspective, we upskill 10,000 to 15,000 women every year in terms of running salons. Some of these women began as junior staff in a salon and now own it – and this has changed their lives. The objective is to empower women to open salons and in turn hire more women. We also address issues such as street harassment. In 2022 we trained more than 40,000 people on this issue via our website and chatbot. Another programme involves financial support to Circle, a women-led NGO which provides digital literacy and training to over 5,000 women in 2022 and a further 5,000 in 2023.

MMA: How did L'Oréal deal with challenges such as Covid-19, and more recently the current economic downturn?

QN: Every challenge brings an opportunity. It was during Covid when everything was shut down that consumers began to take an interest in beauty, and as e-commerce grew, so did the accessibility of products widen to include smaller towns and rural centres. From the perspective of the current economic downturn, we intend to invest heavily in localisation to ensure better prices, especially given that imported products have become so expensive. So, it is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity, even if managing the economic volatility remains a significant business challenge. Furthermore, in inflationary times most people tend to spend less on big-ticket items like cars, houses or vacations, and this leaves them with extra money for smaller luxuries like beauty products.

MMA: What are your main retail avenues?

QN: Supermarkets play a significant role; e-commerce is growing exponentially and has a lot of potential considering that approximately 80% of online orders originate from five to seven cities. ■

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Should Men Look Good Only To Attract Women?

Why are beauty and personal care ads aimed at Pakistani men so lame? Sami Qahar poses the question.

Vanity is not gender specific. Social norms have changed, or I should say, evolved. There was a time when beauty and vanity were taboo topics for men and, when it came to personal care products and services, women were the only subscribers.

The rise of metrosexual men is a notable sociocultural shift that has gained traction in recent years and it is a phenomenon that reflects a transformation in the traditional notions of masculinity, whereby men have become increasingly conscious of their looks and attentive to fashion and personal care.

Noted gender studies scholar, Michael Kimmel, explored the changing dynamics of masculinity in contemporary society in his book *Manhood in America*. The book itself is 27 years old, and things have changed even more since. The topic was further researched in 2011 by Jongsung Kim and Kim K.P. Johnson, something which I thoroughly enjoyed studying during my psychology studies days. Kim and Johnson delved deeper into men's grooming needs and practices, illustrating the role of the media in shaping those behaviours.

The emergence of metrosexual men can be attributed to several factors, including the influence of popular culture, marketing strategies by the beauty, personal care and fashion industries and evolving gender roles. As men increasingly embrace self-care, it is evident that the modern man is more willing than ever to invest in his appearance and challenge traditional stereotypes of masculinity.

In the Indian Subcontinent (the closest spectrum for Pakistani male consumers) the trend emerged later compared to America and Europe. Suhraiya Jivraj in 2017 wrote an article called *Masculinities, Consumption and Leisure: Challenging Neoliberalism*, that highlighted how changing global trends were affecting Subcontinental men and the noticeable surge in men's beauty consciousness, characterised by increased attention to fashion, skincare and personal care routines.

As traditional gender roles evolve, this transformation is evidenced in the advertising and marketing strategies employed by the beauty, personal care and fashion industries, as demonstrated in studies such as Uzma Rashid and Qurat-Ul-Ain Khokhar's *Representation of Men in Advertising: A Comparative Study of Pakistan and the United States* (2019). These shifts in attitude and behaviour indicate that the Subcontinent, like many other regions, is experiencing growing acceptance of men embracing self-care practices that go beyond the conventional norms of masculinity.



What does this mean for Pakistani advertisers and product manufacturers?

Without sounding too academic, let's first explore what men are doing in Pakistani advertising in general. They are shown in non-subordinate positions, most of the voice-overs are done by men (even if they are addressing women) and men are shown to have little input in the indoor activities of a household. While banks and automobiles use men as central characters, when it comes to beauty and personal care categories, men become mere spectators, or dare I say, props. Rare occurrences, of course, were always there; for example, Lifebuoy Red Carbolic Soap in the late eighties or early nineties, showed a train full of football playing men, throwing soap from one to another and enjoying the train ride. I don't see any such communication happening anymore and Lifebuoy has since moved to becoming an anti-bacterial and beauty soap.

Nonetheless, there are still some categories in the personal care segment that do target men as their bull's eye audience. Gillette comes to mind, even if among desi men shaving has declined over the last decade. Other than shaving, haircare (shampoos), facewash (with a hint of skin whitening), deodorants, some toothpaste brands and fragrances are still targeting men. Veet took a leap of faith and introduced a men's variant showing a very macho hair removal visual in their communication. I have little information about the success or failure of the product; however, the communication has been off air for a long time.

One of the most successful men's brands, Axe, sold the 'fragrant promise of irresistibility' for decades and still does. This is the actual brand essence of Axe the brand and its success forced a lot of other brands into using the same formula in order to attract men to their own products. And why not? What can be more important to men than being attractive to the opposite gender, right? Not their passions, not their ambition, or

their other relationships, but being attractive to the opposite gender. These advertisements tend to perpetuate traditional gender roles and stereotypes, reinforcing the idea that a man's worth is closely tied to his desirability to the opposite sex. Such messaging can create unrealistic standards for men and may inadvertently contribute to body image issues and other insecurities.

Success is a very intriguing platform that is used to target men. Our society expects men to be successful, in particular financially. In their advertising, banks, telecom and automobiles companies (among others) keep showing men as highly successful individuals. Yet, when it comes to men's personal care products, the advertising barely touches the notion of success. A recently aired TVC of Fair Menz facewash shows a nurse drooling over a man in a hospital because of his skin colour. Yes, this is 2023 and we still have women drooling over men in ads because of how they look. Have a look at TV commercials for shampoos, deodorants and even Veet, and see which one shows the financially successful man? None. Even though it's the same man who is being sold 'success' as the end benefit by banks and cars.

What about emotional advertising? Tea, banks, insurance companies and even cars, have sold emotional relationships to men, yet no personal care brand has tried going down this route. This is pigeonholed advertising at its finest. Humour has been tried, like the skin whitening TVC I mentioned earlier and by a few deodorant brands, but in a 'cringe' sort of way, and that too related to the opposite sex. And let's not forget the overly testosterone loaded masculine TVCs like Fahad Mustafa breaking a car with a hammer in a commercial for a deodorant, looking all rugged and tough. Why was he breaking the car? I have no idea.

To be fair, I may seem a little harsh. There are good examples too. Sunscreen brands have been endorsed by sportsmen, which

is a relevant celebrity segment in that category. They also cover the success angle, because those sportsmen are successful in their fields. Perfumes such as 501 by Wasim Akram and 555 by Jahangir Khan fall in the same category.

One of my favourite success stories is Dari Mooth, a specifically targeted men's personal care brand that although promotes itself only digitally, has managed to garner a lot of praise, engagement and sales. Boasting over 200,000 followers on social media, people in the know suggest that their sales numbers are staggering, and growing. The brand has recently expanded its footprint in the Middle East as well. What I really admire about Dari Mooth is that it captured the insight and current market needs very well. While Gillette was busy selling razors to consumers who were not willing to shave, Dari Mooth offered them what they needed, but did not have – grooming for facial hair. They fulfilled an unmet need and reaped the benefits. This goes to prove the age-old philosophy of using insight to develop products, services and advertising.

I have seen at least four Pakistani TV commercials aimed at men, and they all start with a celebrity fixing his jacket just before the camera shows him walking. It's a shot in the popular Chris Hemsworth perfume ad. However, even with these unimaginative concepts, I see the men's personal care industry growing in Pakistan. Vanity will stay, irrespective of its gender. If Huda Kattan can create an empire based on women's beauty needs and insecurities, the market for men is out there waiting with open arms. The category is going to grow as more and more men start taking care of themselves. The trick is to find the unmet needs and then connect to the target audience emotionally or at least with a purpose that goes beyond being attractive to the opposite gender. ■

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Personal Care Has a Makeover

The personal care category is at the forefront of a huge revolution in terms of consumer adoption, writes Khalid Naseem.

As gender norms crumble, the world of personal care is undergoing a makeover. From Asia to America, people are embracing a revolution in personal care, and this movement is creeping into our society as well. What is hot in the USA today will be popular in Pakistan soon. The future of beauty is now borderless.

The lines between 'his' and 'hers' are fast fading. Gender stereotypes are in retreat and no one can dictate which lotion goes on our skin or which razor touches our face. Men are now embracing skincare as if it were the latest tech gadget and women are rocking grooming products that were once labelled for 'men only'. In this world, shampoo is not for 'him' or 'her,' and fragrances don't play by gender rules. This is a world where gender norms are fusing, where authenticity is being celebrated and marketers are being challenged. It is not so uncommon to see men wearing lipsticks and earrings. Women's hair is becoming shorter and men's is becoming longer – although both want fairness because it's a highly sought-after trait in the marital and job markets.

From childhood, we have been told that pink is for girls and blue is for boys. These norms are then reflected in the 'pink' buses for women and the pink ribbon for breast cancer awareness. But are these distinctions nothing more than societal labels? The trend towards breaking these norms is a pivotal moment in our evolution. In some market research surveys, the questionnaire will state that 'housewife' need not necessarily be the lady of the house, but anyone who does most of the household chores.

Gen Z are rewriting the script by refusing to allow gender norms to define them. Maybe it is because they don't like to be defined, or because it compromises their individuality. Whatever the reason, the walls of conformity are crumbling as young men wear makeup and skirts. It reflects a determination to stand out and be authentic; one that is reshaping the landscape of self-expression. Covid-19 brought with it the opportunity for Gen Z to re-look at life. Amidst the solitude of quarantine, many found the space to rediscover themselves. Reflecting on who we are is the first step towards dismantling gender norms. The courage to embrace one's appearance as an expression of authenticity is born from introspection. The seeds of this change were sown by icons such as Michael Jackson and Prince, who shattered barriers, using their art to challenge conventional expectations and their influence resonates today, inspiring a new generation to break free from the chains of conformity.



Social media has turned into the catalyst for acceptance. The ideal of self-expression is spreading like wildfire, inspiring others to shed their inhibitions and embrace themselves as they truly are. Platforms like TikTok (which has become a global stage for individuality) foster communities where authenticity is celebrated.

No doubt with progress comes resistance and there are many people who yearn for a return to the ideals of masculinity. Nevertheless, the tide has shifted. The notion that appearances determine competence is increasingly seen as absurd and that the time has come to acknowledge that clothing is a canvas, not a cage. Colours and styles don't define us; they are threads in the fabric of our identity. It is about embracing the freedom to be oneself; to wear whatever resonates with our soul.

So how do marketers prepare for the gender-neutral marketing revolution? The playbook of gender norms has been tossed out the window and there is more to it than catchy slogans. It is now about celebrating everyone and making them feel seen, regardless of gender identity.

1. Be Inclusive: The new era demands messages that speak to men and women alike. It's time to champion inclusivity by embracing gender-neutral language, diverse casting, and showcasing a variety of skin types and body shapes. Campaigns should be a warm hug that welcome everyone to the beauty party.

2. Products for everyone; not labels: Embrace gender-neutral products. From moisturisers to haircare, this is now in a world of 'equal-opportunities'. I have never hesitated to buy pink razors for my underarms; who's watching me anyway? By developing products that transcend gender expectations, brands are not just tapping into trends, they are leading the charge for a more open-minded future.

3. Shattering norms: Campaigns that break gender stereotypes and celebrate individuality are the new secret weapon. By showing that beauty has no bounds, you are not just selling a brand, you are shaping culture. News is no longer a touchpoint for men only, and dramas are not only watched

by women. We need to re-look at our content as well as where and when we share it.

4. Educate and empower: It's time to demystify the nuances of gender. Brands need to collaborate with activists, spread awareness, and drive the conversation about the intersection between personal care and gender identity. The message is not just about a product; it's about moving ahead. It's not only 'women who are worth it', men are worth it too. L'Oréal may have to revisit their communication soon. In this world, personalisation reigns supreme, so use data to your advantage and align your message with each person's unique style and needs; from the scent that captures their essence to the skincare that reflects their vibe.

In a world where people are redefining themselves, particularly the young, the personal care category is at the forefront of a huge change. The new narrative is about inclusivity and challenging the norms that no longer serve us. Let us all make looking good a celebration for everyone. ■

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Aspirations of Beauty

Fatima S. Attarwala explores how Pakistani women approach their beauty.

What is personal care? The query, addressed to a diverse group of Millennial moms across socio-economic groups, was answered with the desire for three basic necessities; peaceful shut-eye, a healthy diet and time out for exercise were the panacea of motherhood needs.

Digging deeper and explaining that skin and hair care also come under personal care brought a somewhat disconcerting backlash of cultural discord. On one hand, women are supposed to be beautiful. On the other, regardless of their background, spending too much time and effort on oneself is frowned upon. Being too busy to indulge in self-care is worn as a badge of honour.

Nevertheless, some products and practices have woven themselves into the fabric of everyday lives and could hardly be considered an indulgence. Moisturisers – the bulwark of skincare – are one such product. ‘Lotion’ is the catch-all phrase for creams that boast some properties of Vitamin C or sunblock, but can be lumped under the basic category of a moisturiser. Whether picked up during a grocery run to the supermarket or from a small over-the-counter makeup shop, lotions are the foundation of personal care that most women acknowledge without any cultural qualms.

Another commonality among women is the trip to the ‘parlour’ (as spas and beauty salons are known in Pakistan). Threading, waxing, facials, mani-pedis, dye jobs and hair treatments are fair game and far more socially acceptable than slathering on an array of creams overnight. For women with a little more money in their pockets, treatments such as platelet-rich plasma injections and hydra-facials by board-certified dermatologists are splurged on as well.

What is not as kosher is makeup. As the Pakistani dramas portray daily, women who wear obvious makeup (cat eyes, red lipsticks, strong blush) are ‘fast’ and hence the bad guys. Women who look demure and opt for soft shades or natural colours epitomise *desi* beauty and domesticity.

For the general public in Pakistan, everyday makeup consists of the ubiquitous *kajal* and a subtle lip colour. Eye shadow and dark colours on the lips belong to weddings, which is why the phrase “*Shaadi main ja rahi ho kiya?*” (Are you going to a wedding?) is used as a not-so-subtle insult if a woman has applied bolder shades of colour on her face.

Yet, the yearning for makeup exists. Most of the women I reached out to, even those less active on social media,



knew of or followed at least one makeup-related influencer or page. Invariably, the page turned out to be predominantly bridal makeup, with some party makeup and evening looks. This stems from and feeds into the national narrative that makeup is for over-the-top events such as weddings, and a nearly nude, moisturised face is acceptable and expected for daily life.

Given the current love for all things Korean, there are also products with Korean beauty ingredients to give the popular ‘glass’ look that gives the appearance of skin that is clean, hydrated and firm. “We plan to introduce multi-purpose, clean makeup to our line-up,” says Fatima Khan, founder of Aura Crafts, a company that offers a range of natural skin and hair products. “Clean makeup gives the look of minimal effort in a blend of skincare and makeup. For example, sunscreen plus tinted moisturiser.”

Another narrative still prevalent is the love for light skin tones, though it has become less politically correct to say so. Couched with new terms such as ‘glow’ and ‘radiance’, it is the same basic belief that fairer is prettier but packaged in a more socially-conscious way. Hence, Korean beauty products are popular because they offer flawless fairness.

“Many of our top-selling products help our clients obtain a clear skin,” says Ali Raza, part of the husband-wife duo who runs Nirvana Botanics. Nirvana Botanics started roughly half a decade ago as a home-run business based on the pharmacist background of his wife Saman. Over time, the

business has grown to a volume of thousands of bottles a day along with plans to expand to North America. “Everyone has their own definition and interpretation of clear skin,” Raza says diplomatically.

When Nirvana Botanics started out, their popular products were geared towards skin brightening, but over the years, their top-selling items have become moisturisers and serums. Serums have been around for half a decade as well, but none of the big brand names were targeting specific markets or skincare and haircare issues. In fact, the market was dominated by small indie brands that operated more through word-of-mouth and circles of friends and family. Then in the 2020s, brands like The Ordinary became more popular and increased awareness about the range of serums available. The rage for Korean beauty products helped the trend along as well, and now serums are available in every big brick-and-mortar shop and online.

Each tube and bottle is a promise of beauty, but how authentic are the products? Is skincare regulated by any authority to ensure that women are not burning their skin trying to do away with blemishes and wrinkles? “A lot of products marketed as natural are not,” comments Khan. “It is more of a marketing gimmick that highlights a natural ingredient that may constitute less than one percent of the ingredients.”

Sadly, brands and sales are built more on trust rather than on certification. “The skincare industry does not come under any regulatory authority. However, we have been certified

by the Pakistan Council of Scientific & Industrial Research,” adds Raza.

Beyond the ubiquitous moisturiser, the main age demographic focused on by companies is 18 to 35. Culture again plays a role — younger women are required to look beautiful to attract a husband. Older women are relegated to other roles in society as a mother, wife or daughter-in-law, who are at best required to be well put together and presentable, although being invisible is acceptable too.

Marketing products to the above 40 is not good business because there is little demand, which is why anti-ageing creams and serums occupy a smaller segment of product offerings. Each generation ages and gives way to the next one as the desired demographic for personal care marketing companies. Baby boomers become grandmothers and great-grandmothers, while Gen Z are the hot segment to be targeted. However, the definition of beauty and the regimes required for it have seen tweaks but not major changes.

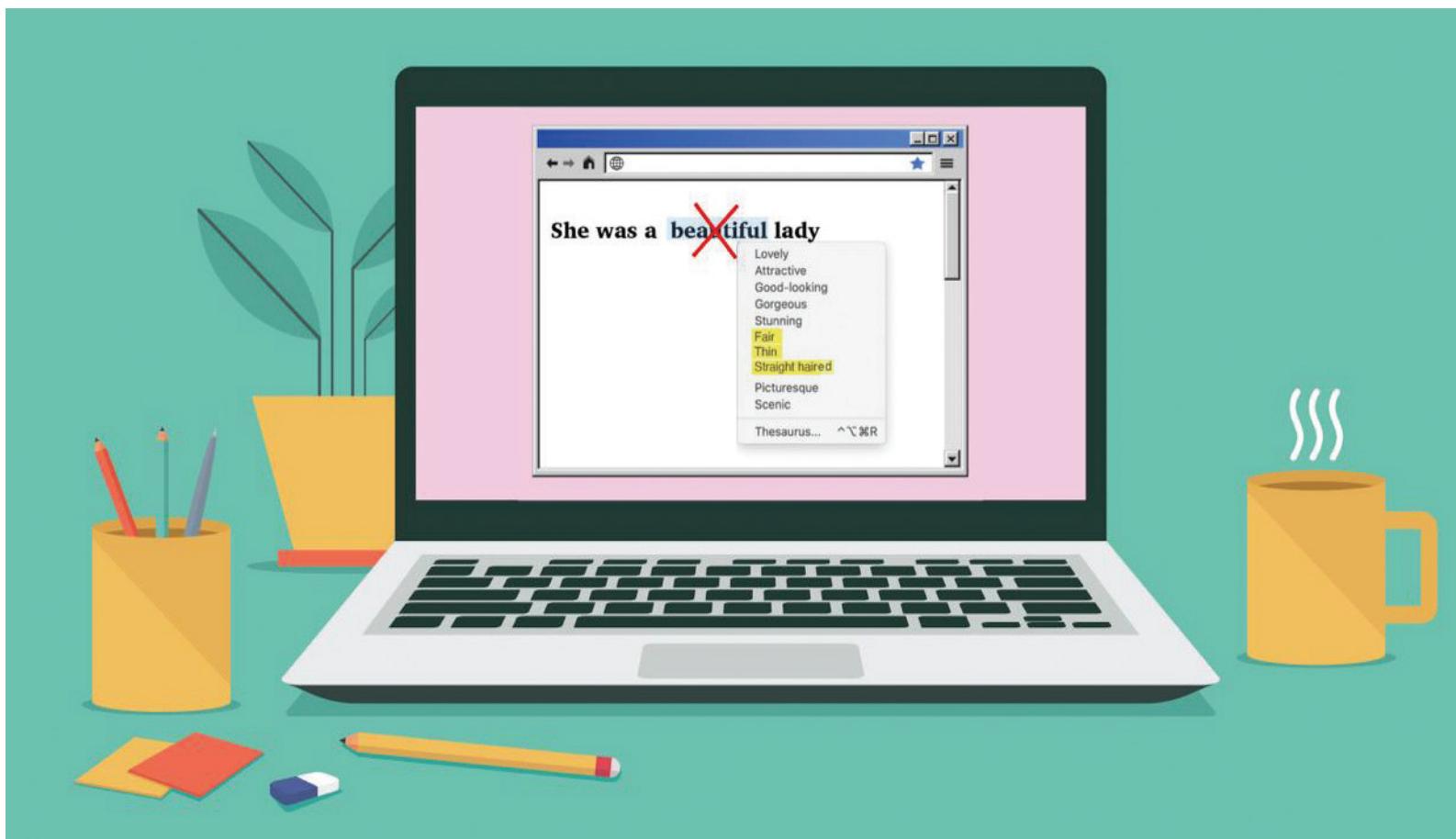
Beauty is still largely equated with being fair and blemish-free. In the days gone by, grandmothers slathered *ubtan* to give a fair, radiant glow, but Gen Z and Millennials opt for Korean products and serums. Attractiveness should be inherently natural and achieved with minimal fuss, even if the zero-effort look requires a lot more work than it seems. ■

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We Are Not Beautiful

As Pakistanis, we need to come to terms with our innate prejudices about beauty, writes Tyrone Tellis.



When my son first started school, an interesting incident occurred. He was asked to write a few sentences about his mother. So he wrote his mother's name and that she is tall – and he also wrote that she is fat – and that is where the problem arose. Apparently, two teachers tried their best to convince him that he could not write this description about his mother. He was adamant that he could. My wife, for her part, had a good laugh. However, the incident does reveal a lot about our attitudes towards body appearance and that old subterfuge beauty.

Beauty has been part of history and folklore for millennia. Men, we are told, have desired and admired beautiful women. Standards of beauty have, of course, varied from age to age and culture to culture, and just as customs and traditions have changed, so has the idea of what beauty is. It's no secret that good-looking people are popular even when the facts tell another tale. Take the myth about Cleopatra's beauty. The Egyptian queen, who was of Macedonian descent, was, according to historians, not the iconic beauty we have seen immortalised on the big screen; she was in fact a woman with a strong personality.

However, talking about the personality of a woman without clubbing it with the word beauty seems like heresy in our modern day and age. We have experienced quite a few revolutions in the past 150 years, and one of them has been the rise of the body positivity movement. The logic

we hear time and again is that everyone (women in particular) is beautiful. To suggest anything else would warrant a lynch mob and brands, it seems, have embraced this mantra. Dove especially has won accolades and public support for embracing body positivity and empowering women to believe they are beautiful.

From an ethical perspective, the reality is different and global brands are dangerously spreading Western ideals of beauty – especially of fair skin. Even in Africa, women are turning to whitening creams, while closer to home in India, there has been a backlash against fairness creams, the ripples of which have been felt in Pakistan. Rights activists have castigated the emphasis on fairness as whitewashing and colonialist. However, to be honest, brands do prey on people's low self-esteem, so it is not surprising that activists and even ordinary people have been condemnatory of certain brands – and while it is true (hate it or love it) that the world is appearance-driven and to a large extent obsessed with perfection, this mindset is nevertheless a dangerous one that breeds low self-confidence at best and self-loathing at worst.

Do brands generate low self-esteem especially among women or do they rely on it? Although this seems to be a chicken-and-egg discussion for most, I feel that brands zero in on the insecurity and sense of inadequacy created by the negative incidents that affect our lives. Do brands in the beauty and personal care business have

a moral responsibility to change the way they communicate and advertise? Yes, they do; more so in the age of social media where the veneer of fakeness has become so thick and can lead to damaging mental and emotional consequences.

So are beauty and personal care brands stepping up to the plate? While some have, by embracing plus sizes and ethnically diverse faces, most are still perpetuating the fair skin, slim figure and thin waist stereotype that has influenced millions of impressionable women globally. This is not to say that efforts have not been made towards diversity and inclusivity. I remember when I was doing my A' levels, a student from Somalia joined our class. To introduce himself he told us his name and which country he came from. As expected, very few of us had heard of Somalia, so he asked us if we had heard of supermodel Iman, informing us that she too was from Somalia. We all knew that Iman was among the most beautiful and celebrated women in the world, but for that student, it meant representation and global prestige for his country.

So has enough been done? The answer is that small steps have been made. We all know how Dove made body positivity a cause. Furthermore, the popularity of people like Priyanka Chopra and the launch of brands by Rihanna has meant that women who are not necessarily fair or slim can find suitable products for their skin tones. In Pakistan, however, it is rare for a beauty

or fashion brand to divert from the stereotypical skin colour, body type and height seen on international ramps and screens. For things to change, we need to accept our colourism and prejudice towards darker complexions first.

As any sociologist will tell you, beauty is a social construct, and although it varies from society to society, the ideal of beauty is the same; to be thin and fair. Cindy Crawford made a telling point when she said she wished she could look like Cindy Crawford when she is on screen.

Today, brands in the beauty and personal care segment are endorsing body positivity and as far as good intentions go, this is worthy, but it is not enough. In my view, beauty standards are not the issue. Beauty as a standard is.

We need to drop the slogan that everyone is beautiful and I also think that the adage that beauty is only skin deep is even more toxic. We need to tell ourselves and especially our children that what we need to do is focus on what is beneath – that is what really matters. As a society, we – the public, the activists and brands – need to learn to celebrate substance instead of something as superficial as skin. Ed Sheeran embraced this mindset in his song *Beautiful People*: "That's not who we are; we are not beautiful. Yeah, that's not who we are; we are not beautiful."

And that is not something to be ashamed of. ■

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SnappRetail

THE SNAPPRETAIL STORY

Today technology is reshaping industries and lives globally. Over the last decade, groundbreaking advancements have revolutionized all sectors, enhancing their capabilities.

The retail industry also has undergone a technological revolution. Complex retail operations occur continuously, involving thousands of consumers in a given area. Modern trade and e-commerce have utilized technology to enhance efficiency across the value chain. While these players have benefited from better access to technology, capital, and resources, traditional trade remains significant in developing economies like Pakistan, India, Brazil, and Indonesia.

SnappRetail steps in to address this disparity:

SnappRetail is a retail fintech startup, focusing on digitalizing traditional trade in Pakistan. Our Micro ERP empowers retail owners to digitalize Sales, Inventory Management, Credit Management, Stock Ordering, Analytics, Micro-lending, Digital payments, and Ecommerce for both B2B and B2C.

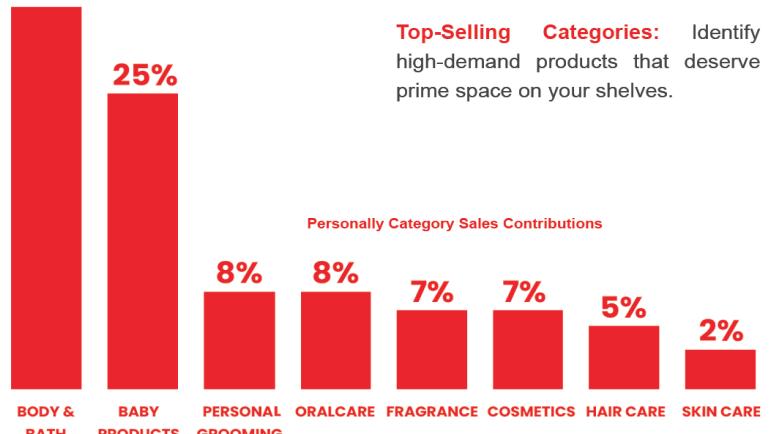
Through SnappRetail system, traditional retailers can optimize their functions strategically, fostering growth and competitiveness in today's landscape.

The potential impact of SnappRetail on the retail sector is huge, creating value that extends to millions of lives across Pakistan. Our goal is to onboard millions of traditional trade retailers, triggering a ripple effect with far-reaching consequences. The user-friendly interface of the MES streamlines retailers' day-to-day activities, offering a seamless experience that has garnered positive feedback from our onboarded retailers. Collaboration is at the heart of our approach, as we seek to work alongside other market players to provide the best possible service for customers. SnappRetail aims to create an ecosystem where aggregators and applications can leverage our platform to enhance their services.

Automation out of data darkness: At SnappRetail, we've revolutionized the retail industry in Pakistan with our innovative E-POS, hardware, and software devices strategically placed in every store. When a customer steps into one of our partner stores and makes a purchase, our state-of-the-art system captures the transaction data. This isn't just about recording sales; it's about understanding the entire customer journey.

Our dedicated team of data analysts and data scientists dive deep into this treasure trove of information to

39%



uncover invaluable insights. We're not just crunching numbers; we're deciphering shopper behaviors, preferences, and trends. It's about turning raw data into actionable intelligence.

Traditionally, Pakistan's Retail Audit relied heavily on 'claimed' data collected by field personnel, often relying on retailers' memory recall. This approach had its limitations, mainly due to the lack of a structured data collection method, especially in the traditional trade sector, which makes up a substantial 75% of the retail industry. But here at SnappRetail, we've changed the game. We've strategically placed our devices within stores, marking a significant leap forward in Pakistan's retail audit industry. We've embraced Point of Sale (POS) scan data, the gold standard in the Consumer-Packaged Goods (CPG) industry. This transformation means we can analyze trends with unprecedented precision. We're not just providing data; we're delivering the insights that decision-makers need to excel in today's dynamic market. With SnappRetail, it's not just about recording transactions; it's about unlocking the true potential of your business.



SnappRetail Customers

Basket Analysis: Maximize cross-selling opportunities and boost sales by understanding buying patterns.

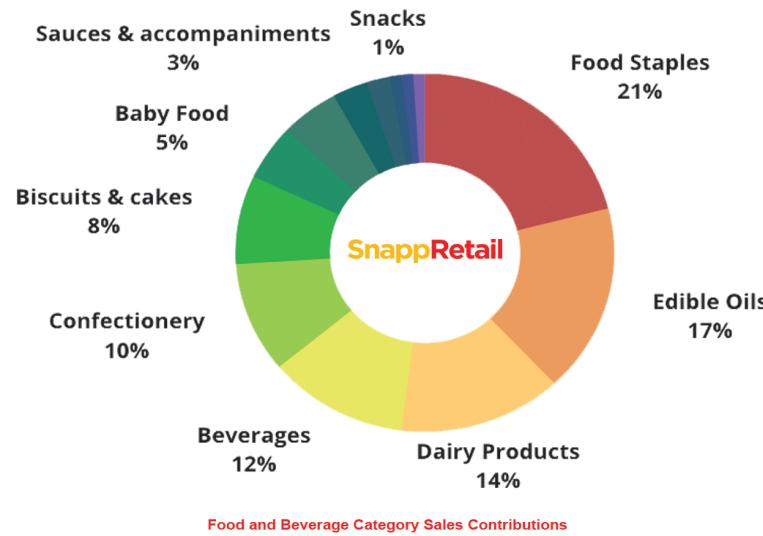
Consumer Analysis: Dive deep into consumer habits and preferences to tailor your offerings.

Retail Landscape Overview: Gain comprehensive insights into the dynamics shaping the retail market.

SKU Data: Track the performance of individual products to make informed stocking decisions.

Pioneering Towards a Data-Driven Future: Our vision extends beyond the present as we aspire to evolve into a blockchain-powered solution.

By providing a platform for comprehensive retail insights covering traditional and specialized stores throughout Pakistan, we envision a future where data is readily accessible and leveraged to its full potential. In the ever-transforming world of retail, with accurate insights from SnappRetail, the future of retail is more promising than ever before.



The Insights We Unveil

So, what kind of insights can SnappRetail provide for organization? The possibilities are vast, empowering stakeholders to make informed decisions that drive growth:

Consumer Data: Understand your target audience in unprecedented depth, unraveling their preferences and behaviors.

Pricing Data: Optimize your pricing strategy to ensure maximum profitability without compromising competitiveness.

Purchasing Patterns: Reveal hidden patterns and trends in consumer behavior within traditional retail stores.

Top-Selling Categories: Identify high-demand products that deserve prime space on your shelves.

About the Team: SnappRetail was founded by Adeel Rasheed (CEO), Moazzam Ali Khan (Chief Strategy Officer), Ahsan Aziz (Chief Product Officer), Moiz Ali (CTO), and is currently led by Tariq Bashir (COO). Collectively, they possess over 70 years of experience in the retail tech and fintech sectors. Their extensive experience in the retail industry has enabled them to create robust plans for digitizing the retail value chain and supporting marginalized retailers. SnappRetail combines decades of experience along with innovative technology to help retailers grow their business and subsequently uplift the entire sector.

Directors: Ahsan Aziz, Moiz Ali, Adeel Rasheed, Moazzam Ali Khan, Tariq Bashir

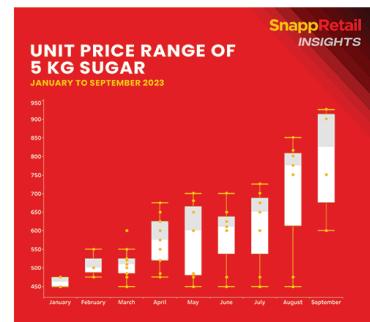


Geographical Analysis: Pinpoint growth prospects in specific regions, capitalizing on localized trends.

Trend Analysis: Stay ahead of the curve with real-time insights into evolving market trends.

Category Analysis: Discover untapped niche markets ripe for expansion.

Market Share Benchmarking: Measure your performance against competitors to gauge your standing.



Sample of Price Chart and Analysis from Actual Data

UNIT PRICE POINTS INTERQUARTILE RANGE
LOWER HALF UPPER HALF

Shahid Afridi Enters the Sports Drink Arena



By Uzma Khateeb-Nawaz

As the fitness movement gains momentum in Pakistan, the prominence of sports drinks has surged, especially among sports and fitness enthusiasts. A recent entrant into the Pakistani market is 10Z – a non-carbonated sports beverage conceived by celebrity cricketer Shahid Afridi.

10Z has been positioned as a 'sports drink' rather than an energy drink (like Red Bull) in order to communicate that it is meant to assist consumers in maintaining their hydration and electrolyte levels during and after their physical activity routine. The communication also emphasises that the drink does not contain any harmful ingredients.

The inspiration behind 10Z is said to come from Afridi's desire to produce a Pakistani sports drink that caters to athletes and fitness enthusiasts. Here, it is pertinent to note that despite the presence of sports drinks like Gatorade and Vitamin Water, until the launch of 10Z there were no prominent local brands.

According to Afridi himself: "The introduction of 10Z is the result of countless hours on the cricket field and a burning desire to elevate athletes' performance. Inspired by the need for sustained energy and optimal hydration during intense matches, we have crafted 10Z to empower fellow players and enthusiasts to push their limits and achieve greatness."

Speaking about the name itself, Muhammad Ibtisam, Director, 10Z, says that it was chosen by Afridi to evoke the number 10 jersey he wears during his matches, while the Z signifies Gen Z, although Ibtisam clarifies that the target demographic also includes active individuals, athletes and fitness enthusiasts. He adds that 10Z is different from similar drinks in the market because of its enhanced nutritional value which boosts energy and hydration. Notably, he says, unlike competitor brands,



10Z contains essential nutrients such as protein, Vitamin C, and magnesium and has a high potassium level.

In fact, the actual formulation of 10Z was developed by Mehran Bottlers, makers of Apple Sidra, Pakola and Vimto. To do so, Mehran conducted research studies on sports drinks and engaged with nutritionists. Mehran also oversees the manufacturing process, including the packaging and bottling. Speaking about his company's role in developing the drink, Zeeshan Habib Teli, CEO, Mehran Bottlers says, "We are honoured to partner with 10Z, a creation by the iconic Shahid Afridi. As proud manufacturers, we share the vision of redefining hydration in order to further empower Pakistan's athletes. Our commitment is to quality and excellence as we work together to make 10Z the top drink in the sports and fitness category."

10Z is distributed by New Nest Distribution, which also distributes other Mehran Bottlers products. So far 10Z is only available in Karachi, although plans are underway to distribute in other cities. In the meantime, 10Z can also be purchased via e-commerce platforms such as Daraz.

10Z comes in two flavours: lemon and orange and is available in 400-millilitre bottles priced at Rs 100. 10Z opted for the 400-millilitre size to differentiate itself from competing brands which are available in 300-millilitre or 500-millilitre SKUs. This decision was also based on market research that determined that athletes often consume 400 millilitres of any particular beverage after working out.

Looking at the competitor landscape, Pepsi Co.'s Gatorade and Searle's Vitamin Water

already have an established market position but are slightly more expensive than 10Z. Gatorade costs Rs 200 for a 500-millilitre bottle and is available in flavours such as Blue Bolt, Tropical Fruit and White Lightning. Vitamin Water costs Rs 100 for a 300-millilitre bottle and has five flavours; Apple, Coconut, Peach, Red Berries and Watermelon.

In Ibtisam's opinion, despite the existing competition, 10Z is well paced to succeed thanks to Afridi's strong backing. "Having Shahid Afridi himself as ambassador gives us an in-built advantage."

Lahore based Half Full Moon Advertising conceived the ad campaign, which – no surprises here – prominently features Afridi and revolves around themes such as "Unleash Your Potential," "Hydration Partner," "Fuel the Fire," and "Stay Energised." The communication also highlights the "Made in Pakistan, Made for Pakistan" aspect of the product.

In terms of marketing, apart from social media and on-ground activities at sports events and health-related venues, the brand intends to establish partnerships with athletes and sports organisations to validate the drink's effectiveness. This, says Ibtisam, "includes collaborations with forthcoming Sports Leagues, well-known Pakistani and international sportspeople as well as celebrities and influencers who live an active lifestyle." In this respect, cricketer Christopher James recently praised 10Z after sampling it, adding credibility to the brand.

Given the current fitness landscape, which has seen the emergence of fitness clubs and gyms in various locations, the outlook for sports drinks appears promising and according to 10Z, the market response has been positive, indicating potential for growth and they plan to ensure its availability from "Karachi to Khyber." ■

Keep Your Cool With Sprite



By Sadia Kamran

In July, during the gruelling days of summer, Sprite set out to break the clutter with their *Thand Rakh* (Keep Cool) campaign's third iteration.

Thand Rakh is actually an adaptation of Sprite's global campaign – 'Heat Happens' which launched in 2021. Previous *Thand Rakh* campaigns revolved around various aspects of 'heat'; be they physical or to do with spicy food. The current campaign focuses on various moments of 'mental heat'; in other words, the daily frustrations that afflict people – waiting in long queues, being stuck in traffic jams, waiting for the electricity to come back on, or women being gawked at by men. The campaign features a cast of celebrities that include musicians Annural Khalid and Kaifi Khalil and actor Hania Aamir Khan.

One of the standout ads (and moments) in the campaign was '*Ghooro Matt – Thand Rakh*', (Don't Stare – Keep Cool) which takes head on the far from uncommon issue of women being stared at by men in public spaces and features Hania Aamir Khan.

Explaining this move, Mavra Khan, Senior Manager, Marketing, The Coca-Cola Company (Sprite's parent company), says that as a global brand, Coca-Cola wanted to shoulder the responsibility of addressing such issues as part of their communication and that "We were happy to be able to start a conversation around an uncomfortable topic and do it tastefully."

Nevertheless, as things go in Pakistan, this particular ad did evoke a degree of negativity, especially on social media, where some critics perceived the ad as objectifying women despite the message. Khan's response is to say that "When we decided to address these challenging conversations in our advertising, we were aware that some negativity would arise, especially as social media is a two-way communication platform," but stresses that on the whole, the idea was well-received and that the brand has been commended for addressing this significant social issue.

Apart from addressing sensitive social issues, another objective of the campaign was to reignite the popularity of Sprite's "authentic" glass bottles, which is why we see the celebrities featured in the ads talk about the glass bottle 'experience'.

The reason here is that apart from cans, Sprite is also available in glass bottles at neighbourhood *kiryana* stores, *paan* kiosks and restaurants; these bottles are usually returned to the retailer for refilling and actually form a significant chunk of Sprite's overall sales and the reason why they are being promoted in the campaign.

In putting together the campaign, which was rolled out across multiple media platforms (out-of-home, digital, TV, radio, print, trade displays, and activations), the brand's in-house creative team worked closely with Soho Ogilvy Pakistan. Sprite also sponsored influencer-recorded podcasts titled *Heat Rant*, in which

the focus was how they deal with those moments that generate 'mental heat' within us.

Talking about the broader objectives of the campaign, Khan points out that Pakistan is counted among Sprite's three largest markets, with India and Latin America taking the first two spots, making it all the more important that a local perspective be incorporated into the brand's communication, more so as it was also a question of connecting with Gen Z (essentially the primary target audience) who are known for their willingness to engage in discussions about uncomfortable social issues. "Gen Z is not looking for glossy perfection or aspirational ads; they want a real conversation and it was up to us to be brave enough to push the envelope and raise these issues," says Khan. "Traditionally, ads for carbonated drinks focus on a cold beverage and a cool (usually male) aspirational figure to go with it. They don't focus on understanding people's daily struggles, which are amplified by the heat."

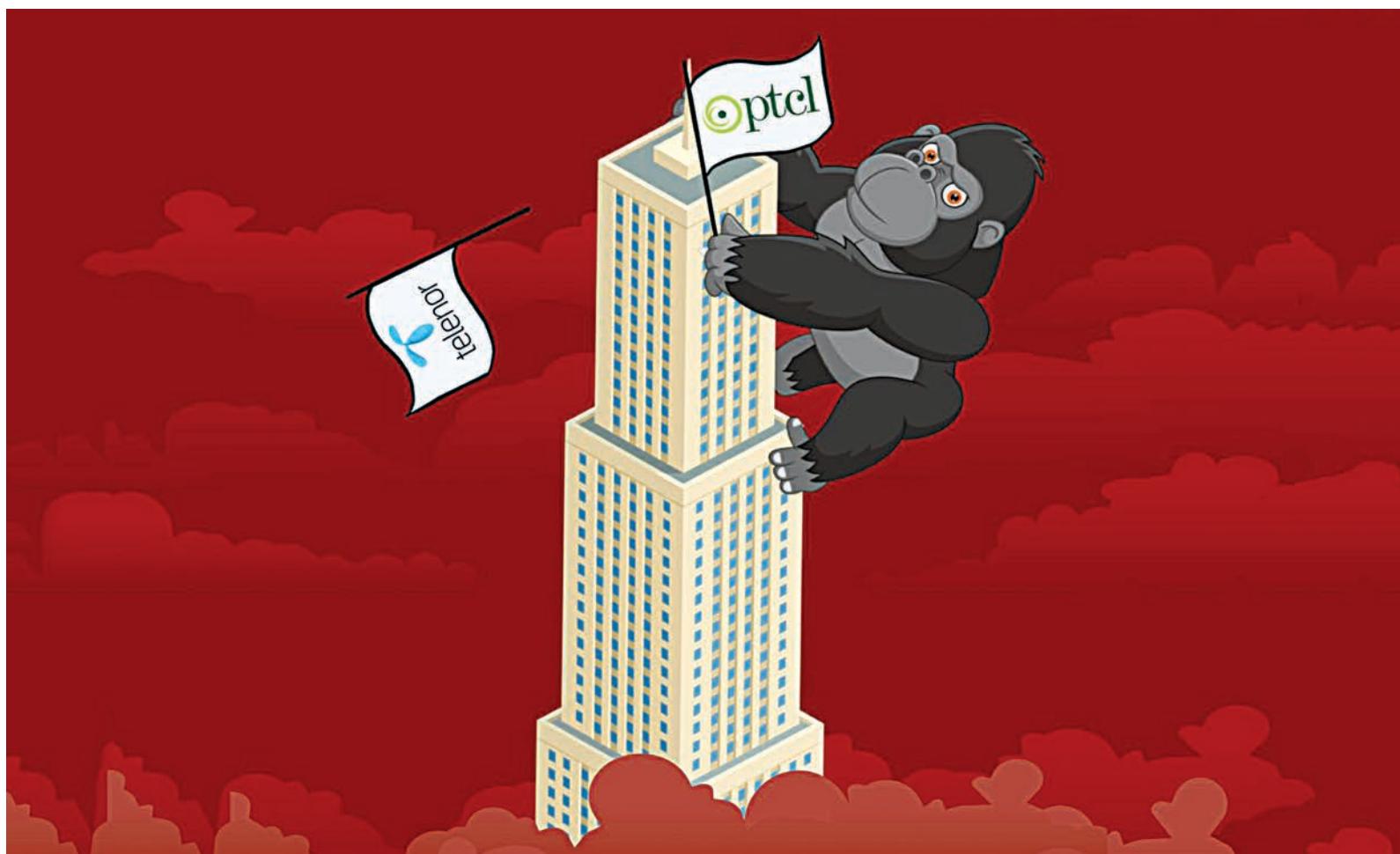
This said, Khan adds that Sprite is a drink for "everybody" and it was important to cater to the brand's different audience segments, especially at a time when due to hyperinflation, families who bought a 1.5-litre bottle of Sprite are now trying to make do with a one-litre bottle. Similarly, consumers who previously thought nothing about buying a soft drink when they were outside, now tend to opt to take a bottle of water from home with them, a trend that is reflected in market figures sourced from Statista.

In fact, Statista notes that the carbonated soft drink market in Pakistan (worth \$1,651 million) has seen a decline in the rate of growth over the last three years and that given the increase in excise taxes applied this year, the sector is expected to experience a growth of a mere 0.14% annually between 2023 and 2027. This is not something that can be taken lightly by the Coca-Cola Company even if at 37%, it currently holds the biggest share of the carbonated drinks market in Pakistan (of which nine percent is attributed to Sprite), especially because in addition to direct competitors such as 7-Up, new alternatives are emerging every day (energy drinks, flavoured milk, chilled coffees or iced teas), making it all the more imperative for all carbonated drink brands to actively seek ways to maintain or expand their market share.

According to the brand team, this year's *Thand Rakh* campaign has proved to be one of Sprite's most successful campaigns and has exceeded engagement and response metrics, outperforming not only other carbonated drinks within Coca-Cola's portfolio but also its competitors.

Khan concludes the conversation by adding, "Our initial objective was to build a meaningful connection with Pakistani consumers, and this campaign has allowed us to establish that relevance. Audiences have appreciated the fact that a major brand has taken the initiative to challenge perceptions about important social issues." ■

A PTCL Buyout of Telenor?



By Nasir Jamal

On August 29, 2023, PTCL announced its intention to make a "binding offer for the acquisition of a(n) (unspecified) target telecom company." Three days later, the company informed the Pakistan Stock Exchange through another letter that it had "evaluated and made an offer to acquire the shares of a target company in the telecom sector." The communication went on to read: "... while the information related to the acquisition of the target may be circulating in the public domain, the question of any merger of PTCL with any other telecom company is not only premature but also speculative as no decision has been taken in relation to the same." Although PTCL is keeping the identity of the telecom company in question under wraps, the market is abuzz with reports that the group is vying for Telenor.

PTCL (UAE-based Etisalat holds a 26% share) has a presence in the telecom sector through its wholly-owned subsidiary Pakistan Telecommunication Mobile Limited (PTML), which owns Ufone. Ufone has close to 24.5 million subscribers, so going by GSMA Intelligence estimates for 2022, the acquisition of Telenor could potentially lead to Pakistan's second largest operator with 73.3 million connections, after Veon-owned Jazz, which has 76.2 million subscribers.

For over a year Telenor has been signalling its intentions to exit Pakistan. It was only

in November last year that Bloomberg reported that the Norwegian company was searching for a buyer to sell its Pakistani operations to, with a price tag of one billion dollars. However, the company has yet to officially confirm its exit plans, although Sigve Brekke, President and Chief Executive Officer Telenor ASA, was reported to have stated a year ago that: "We are also looking at strategic alternatives in Pakistan. The deteriorating macroeconomic situation is concerning. That is also why we are taking a write-down in Pakistan. And based on this, we will do a strategic review of alternatives when it comes to our future operations in Pakistan."

There are multiple reasons why Telenor is looking to exit Pakistan, not least a series of underwhelming financial results. In July 2022, Telenor said it would conduct a strategic review of its Pakistan unit after posting a \$244 million impairment on operations because of deteriorating economic conditions, and then in October, it reported that its underlying earnings in Pakistan had dropped, in part because of rising energy prices.

The reality is that Telenor entered the Pakistani market in 2005 and has been facing serious challenges for the past several years, including, but not limited to, a consistently decreasing average revenue per user (ARPU), which is now less than a dollar for the entire industry, and according to a former employee of the company, "On top of that, Telenor's ARPU

came under further pressure due to its strategy of targeting a low income, rural population in a bid to increase its customer base," which further complicated conditions for the telecom. Added to which, when Pakistan launched 3G/4G services in 2014, Telenor bought the 850 MHz spectrum at a massive price tag of \$395 million, an investment that failed to produce the expected profits due to the fact that the frequency was supported by relatively expensive smartphones and therefore beyond the affordability of the telco's primary user base.

However, a poor customer base expansion and spectrum strategy and slumping ARPU are only part of a bigger problem, which is the 'dollarised' costs of renewing licenses and spectrum prices. In other words, while revenues are generated in Pakistani rupees, all other costs – from government licence fees to the imported equipment required to maintain and expand the network – are paid in dollars, leading to significant and rapid erosion in profits. Last year's devastating floods further affected the company's communication infrastructure and operation capabilities, causing erosion in its customer base.

Tone Hegland Bachke, EVP and CFO, Telenor ASA, is quoted as having said last year: "In Pakistan, the underlying EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) decreased by 22%, which is driven by the energy cost, the FX headwinds, and we also see some negative impact from the flooding on the top line." In

essence, Bachke was telling her company's shareholders that it did not make business sense to prolong its stay in Pakistan.

This said, industry sources also argue that Telenor's decision to exit Pakistan was part of Telenor's broader strategy to liquidate its assets and wind up operations in its Asian markets in order to free up cash flow and that the company is changing its investment strategy not only in Pakistan but is also pulling out of other Asian markets. Five years ago Telenor merged its Indian operations with Bharti Airtel and has conducted similar mergers in Malaysia and Thailand, and exited the telecom market in Myanmar.

The question is now whether PTCL's strategy to invest in acquiring Telenor at a time when industry revenues are collapsing is a sound one. Going forward, the operating challenges facing the telecom industry are projected by industry insiders to increase, as further hikes are expected in the cost of borrowing, fuel and power tariffs – all this on the back of a weakening exchange rate and high inflation. According to a Ufone executive: "Barring a few people at the top, no one knows what the strategy is. Most people know only as much as is reported in the media, so it is difficult to judge whether the bid to buy out Telenor or any other telecom is serious or not. Even the people at Etisalat may not be able to give you more information on that." ■

Nasir Jamal is Bureau Chief, Dawn Lahore. nasirjamal6592@gmail.com



Brand managers must sight of the fact that they think of the consumer

AURORA: What motivated you to make your career in brands?

SHEIKH ADIL HUSSAIN: Earlier on I was interested in history and economics, but while I was doing my MBA I started to gravitate towards marketing and ended up specialising in it. What attracted me was the human behaviour aspect, how the mind behaves when it comes to making purchasing decisions, the interaction people have with brands and how brands position themselves to become a part of people's lifestyles. In my fourth year, I interned at P&G and that sealed it, because P&G is a marketing university in itself; they teach you about brand building from the ground up.

A: In your experience, how have consumers evolved in their consumption and buying behaviour – especially Gen Z?

SAH: Consumers have always wanted authenticity and I don't think this is something new. Brands have always been about delivering certain quality standards. Of course, there has been adaptation as lifestyles have changed and new generations come into play. This new generation is consuming media in a different way. Their attention spans are shorter and this raises its own set of challenges for brands; they have to tailor their messaging and their creativity accordingly, and work on gathering the right insights in the battle to remain relevant. This is where the evolution is taking place. Consumers have grown with the nation. In the beginning, it was more about basics and necessities. Then new consumer brands came in and started changing habits. For example, with Pampers, P&G introduced 'conversion categories' by converting people from using cloth nappies to disposable diapers; these were market development jobs that the big companies, like Proctor, introduced in the early nineties. Categories have also evolved; in personal and home care, we have gone from phenyl to floor cleaners and from using acid to using Harpic, and this is due to the job brands have done. Today, consumers have moved on and want brands to have a purpose that reflects what they feel about the world. Consumers look for the difference between the brand that says it is going to deliver on

a certain promise and the brand that actually does deliver – and the consistency in that delivery.

A: What about changes in media consumption patterns?

SAH: Content consumption is the big thing because internet and smartphone penetration is increasing. A lot more people are consuming the internet on the go and it is now a question of providing bite-sized content while constantly feeding in new content. This said, the brand positioning needs to remain consistent. You can have fresher content (new creative) but it must feed into the same positioning. For example, since Pepsi launched their *Why Not Meri Jaan* campaign, they have made hundreds of creatives and different versions of the theme. They have made songs, cricket-based commercials, TV celebrity-based commercials, and so on – but they have stuck to their *Why Not Meri Jaan* theme.

A: Why is it so important to keep the positioning the same?

SAH: Because it takes years and years to implant something in the brain of a consumer. It is a seeding job. It comes down to mental space, and the neuroscience of it is about creating synapses that link the brand in the consumer's brain. How many things can your brand be associated with? It is about seeing something and thinking about your brand first, and about the number of associations a brand is able to successfully build for itself in the mind of the consumer, and that is why consistency is so necessary.

A: Can consistency work across generations?

SAH: The method to create recall may change, but the recall is still the same. Take the Lux example. Historically, Lux has been about film stars – and it is still about film stars. The stars have changed and moved from a Neeli, Reema and Babra Sharif to a Maya Ali and Mahira. In the past, it would have been a big TVC; today it is a TVC plus digital content. The Lux Style Awards have been going for 21 years. It is a branded piece of content that has created a strong association between the brand and the world of fashion, style and glamour – and it has retained that space. Before, the Lux Style Awards was a big show that people went to; it is still a big show, but now it has also gone digital and although the way the

message is being disseminated is different it also remains consistent. Another example is Dettol which has consistently used the mother and child along with the circle of protection and the sword as their sign of disinfection. These brands have been around for 50 or 60-plus years.

A: Taking the Lux example, do you really think the notion of film stars still resonates with this new generation?

SAH: The onus is on the brand team to find that sweet spot and decide whether the time has come to move from film stars to an influencer or an online celebrity. That is their job. They must know how to adapt the product message; is it the science behind the product that needs to be highlighted or is it the environmental friendliness aspect? The job of the brand custodians is to identify what is relevant and adapt it to the overall message and the communication space they have built (or inherited) for the brand. It is a delicate process and has to be managed in a way that the consistency of the message is retained, but is refreshed in keeping with current trends.

A: You spoke about the importance of frequently refreshing the communication. Has this changed the skill sets required from today's brand managers and are more people needed to do the job?

SAH: Employing more people is a choice that varies from corporation to corporation, but essentially the equation remains the same in terms of having a core team, and depending on the scale of the brand and the business, whether the team consists of a category manager, a brand manager and an assistant brand manager. What has changed is the outsourcing aspect in terms of creative and media partners as well as other support functions and the skill sets that are required at both ends. However, in terms of what is expected of a brand team today, the fundamentals remain the same, although the pace has accelerated because of the sheer number and scale of technological advancements. Perhaps, earlier on, all a brand manager had to know was how to craft a communication for TV, adapt it to radio, print and outdoor, develop two campaigns a year and maybe

one innovation – and job done. Today, a brand manager needs to always be on communication. They have to simultaneously manage multiple campaigns – for example, a search strategy and an e-commerce campaign.

A: Specifically, in the beauty and personal care categories, how has consumer behaviour evolved?

SAH: The biggest change in the Pakistani context has been to move away from relying on a single type of cream and the obsession with fairness. The major change has been the introduction of the concept of a 'beauty regime'; whether it is a skincare regime or a hair regime. It is basically about consistently using multiple products in a certain sequence over a period of time to get a result. The Korean beauty example has become a major influence in this respect. In Pakistan, we may not follow the Korean example of a six to 10 and even 16 products a day regime, but we have evolved from using just one cream daily to using three, four or even five products a day, depending on availability and affordability. Another change is the fact that awareness has reached a level where people know about the importance of ingredients and what kind of products best suit different kinds of skin or hair types, and if consumers don't get the information they require from a product, they ask for it. People want to know the science behind the products and about the formulations. Another thing that has happened is the democratisation of the formulations themselves. Many home-based products on Instagram have access to the ingredients that make up a formula and make it themselves. Globally, there are companies that develop formulations that can be used by any brand; they can put their name to it and sell it. It has become a similar situation to the OEM (original equipment manufacturers) in the electronic market, where one person makes all the flat screens and others put their own names on the formulation and sell them. What has also changed is that it is no longer a question of producing just one product and making it available in four different variants; it is about introducing new ingredient-based products really

SHEIKH ADIL HUSSAIN

never lose must always first

Marketing Director, Hair Care, Unilever Pakistan, speaks to Aurora about the changes in the beauty and personal care category and what it means for the market leaders.



fast, and although they may not sell in large volumes, selling them frequently to a loyal niche for a short time until you come up with something new. This is the way it is going, and it is presenting a challenge to the big companies to figure out new sourcing and new go-to market strategies.

A: What would these new go-to market strategies involve?

SAH: You need to be where consumers are going for their information – their Instagram reels and TikTok feeds. They are listening to authentic stories from ordinary consumers or from influencers, and this is where you need to put your information and you need to put it in a digestible and a memorable way; in a format that creates recall and trial for your brand – and you need to do it regularly. This is the challenge for brand teams.

Customer services have become a big deal. You need to have a phone number or an email address or a social media presence where consumers can go and ask questions and get a reply. You absolutely have to have forums where consumers can interact with your brand and ask questions like: "I have frizzy hair so which product from your portfolio will suit me best?"

A: Who provides the answers to these questions?

SAH: We have trained agents at our call centres and on the relevant social media platforms, and they have to know what they are talking about, which is why we give them regular trainings. The same goes for our in-store brand ambassadors; they are refreshed every month with new messages and new information. What has changed is that we are able to use a lot more technology-based solutions to interact with consumers. For example, we use AI to carry out a diagnosis of someone's scalp or skin in order to provide the right portfolio solution.

A: Are the brand challenges the same in the rural areas?

SAH: The base assumption is that urban consumers are more aware/informed compared to rural consumers, but the gap has closed dramatically because of the flow of information. Also keep in mind that within the rural demographic, there are the affluent rurals, who have the buying power. When we talk



about rural and urban, we get this village and city visual in our heads, but that is not necessarily true in terms of consumption patterns and it is the job of the brand team to go there and find those insights. Brand managers must never lose sight of the fact that they must always think of the consumer first, regardless of where she or he lives. Keeping the consumer in mind is what leads to the solution in terms of how to get the message across and what kind of product to make. Take Lifebuoy Shampoo's recent launch of its onion variant. We would not have discovered the benefits onions have on hair had we not gone to the consumers and asked them about the natural home-based remedies they use for their hair – and most of us would have expected to hear about egg yolks or yoghurt. Yet, when you get into the science of it, it turns out that onions contain natural sulphur which is very good for hair regrowth and strengthening. These kinds of insights only come once you make yourself uncomfortable by getting out of the office and talking to the consumer.

A: Did the insight about onions come out of Pakistan?

SAH: Although onions are used in other parts of the Subcontinent for hair care, it was a solution that we came up with in Pakistan.

A: What challenges do multinational companies face given the rise of local beauty and personal care products that

are not only cheaper, but come with claims of being authentic and natural?

SAH: The biggest challenge is to be relevant – always. Although in Pakistan there were a few local brands in the market from the beginning, the generation who are now in their forties and fifties, have grown up with the international brands that entered the market very early on. Then and now the challenge for international brands is to be relevant by integrating into our lifestyle and speaking our language while still retaining their 'internationality'. The second challenge is to provide value, and here international companies have their own pressures in terms of their financials. They have pressures to increase prices in order to protect their margins and that is when they have to come up with creative ways of providing the same value to their consumers while protecting themselves, because at the end of the day they are here for a commercial purpose.

A: The financial pressures must have been all the more apparent given the current economic climate.

SAH: This year has been really volatile. On the flip side, I think the onus on the multinationals is to keep pushing the envelope in terms of innovations. In fact, they are usually the ones that take the lead because they have the resources and the processes to come up with new products. For example, if

Pampers had not come to Pakistan, I don't think anyone would have thought about disposable nappies. They may have eventually, but it would have been an imitation of a foreign product.

A: Finally, is there a known way to brand failure?

SAH: For me a sure shot way to failure is when you mess with the product and fail to deliver on the quality. Examples that jump out immediately come from the milk category; specifically, Tarang and Haleeb. Both brands tampered with their quality and saw their sales crash as a result. Tarang was, if I remember correctly, one of the fastest-growing brands in Pakistan with a turnover that was almost equal to Sooper's; but today, it does not exist anymore. Haleeb did the same thing – the brand accounted for half the market share in the milk category – and today it has almost been wiped out. The basic premise of a brand is the promise that it will give you the same quality every time you use it, and if you break that promise the consumer is not going to buy you next time, and trust me, once you lose a consumer, it is a tough job getting him or her back. You can eventually recover from bad distribution, a bad campaign or even a bad pricing strategy – but recovering from a bad quality perception is almost impossible. ■

Sheikh Adil Hussain was in conversation with Mariam Ali Baig. For feedback: aurora@dawn.com

Campaign Watch

By Zuneeta Rawat

As we inch closer towards the last quarter of 2023, here are my top five picks of the season. I must admit that finding ads that qualified to make it to this list took a lot more time and effort than I had imagined. It made me wonder whether, as an industry, are we producing enough quality campaigns. Here are the campaigns I felt worked.

Brand: Nurpur

Agency: Prestige Communications

Campaign: Breakfast Badlo

Message: Delicious breakfast for chaos-free tasty mornings

Effectiveness: The campaign captures the essence of the morning madness every mother has to face. Sleepy kids and grumpy husbands who are never

pleased with what is on the breakfast table. The execution is dramatic and exaggerated, something that many food brands shy away from. However, the insight is as generic as it gets. This 90-second film could have perhaps been a little shorter but the screenplay makes it interesting and worth the watch.

Verdict: As much as I miss the nostalgic Nurpur food films, I am excited to see what the new era will bring for the brand.



Brand: SIUT



Agency: In-house

Campaign: Children Hospital

Message: Millions of patients need our support to help raise funds to build SIUT's Children Hospital

Effectiveness: This campaign is based on the simple, strong and real insight that parents never give up on their children. The film struck all the right chords and reignited the spirit of fighting against all odds together. The campaign tied the insight of never giving up to the idea of never giving up hope of raising funding worth Rs 2.5 billion to build SIUT's Children Hospital.

Verdict: The right insight coupled with strong copywriting makes all the difference.

Brand: Pepsi

Agency: BBDO Pakistan

Campaign: Pepsi – Ab Har Ghoont Strong

Message: Pepsi now tastes stronger

Effectiveness: This film relies on a single dialogue to communicate the message – and does so brilliantly, "Babar bhai, aap sahi keh rahe the. Pepsi waqi strong hogayi hai." This one line bridges this commercial with the previous one (featuring Babar Azam at an airport) and proves that you don't need a never-ending been-there-heard-that melodramatic or over-the-top script to communicate a message. Set in a very Indian-inspired world, every element has been properly thought through so that nothing overshadows the message. From the location to the cinematography, the wardrobe to the vocals – it's simple... and who says simple has to be boring?

Verdict: Love the vibe, the music and the lyrics.



Brand: Sooper



Agency: Adcom Leo Burnett

Campaign: Dua-e-Taufeeq

Message: In tough times, be a ray of hope and joy for others around you

Effectiveness: Finally, a Ramzan ad that is not situated in a mosque or around the dining table! No mother frying pakoras and kids running around creating a mess? Am I dreaming? Conceptualised around a relatable everyday situation, this ad moves away from over-the-top emotions and melodrama to deliver the simple message of helping those around us. From the choice of actors to the set design, the smiles to the chemistry between the protagonists, this film is all heart. It encapsulates a large message in a simple and effortless way, making us realise how easy it is to spread joy. One must also take note of how the team always manages to find the most appropriate song for their Ramzan commercials every year.

Verdict: Seedha, saadha, Sooper! ■

Brand: Unilever Pakistan

Agency: AltStory

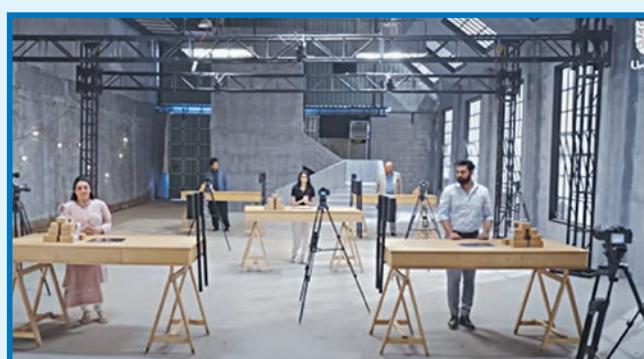
Campaign: Liveable Independence

Message: To shape a future where everyone earns liveable wages

Effectiveness: Based on a thought that has been at the back of my mind as the situation in Pakistan gets tougher by the day, this commercial gives us all food for thought.

It shows how hard decision-making can be when you have limited resources and you have to choose between food, medical expenses, school fees and house rent. These challenges are faced by people all around us; our drivers, domestic help, office staff and so on, all of whom have to survive on minimum wages and make choices about what to give up every day. As close to my heart as this topic is, I do feel the execution could have been better, much better.

Verdict: Raising awareness about a pressing issue is one thing but doing something about it is another, and I hope the brand is doing both and that others follow their example.



Zuneeta Rawat is head of the marketing and creative department at Image. zuneetaraawat@hotmail.com

Waking Up To Woke

To come to terms with woke consumerism, brands need to dig a lot deeper than they are currently doing, argues Afzal Hussain.



1 Consumerism is capitalism's first cousin.

Classic consumerism is about consumers enhancing their lifestyles in line with evolving societal norms and standards, and the classic role of marketing has been to increase the 'consumption' of brands in order to enhance the profits of the corporations that own them. It is usually a systematic journey of driving excess with the reward of prestige, fame and bonuses for the marketers aboard the gravy train. The challenge is that societal norms shift with time, and we are now in the middle of another such shift, whereby Gen Z and Millennials are challenging the relentless trend towards increasing consumption, without transparency and without sharing the benefits of this consumption with the broader communities they operate within – and which brings us to the subject of 'woke' consumerism.

Woke consumerism is when consumers demand that their brands 'wake up and become more socially, ethically and environmentally accountable.' This change has arrived, and it's here to stay, as according to a global Millennial survey conducted by Deloitte, 63% of Millennials and 70% of Gen Z are willing to pay more for products and services that are committed to social and environmental responsibility, rather than to driving excessive consumption. In this situation, the knee-jerk reaction from marketers is to bring clever shifts in their advertising to play into their consumers' wokeness, but

without really changing anything deep down. Today, this superficial 'washing' can often lead to severe consumer backlashes.

2 Washed outside but not inside.

According to research conducted by BCG/MIT, 90% of executives say that sustainability is important. However, the problem here is that only 60% of organisations have a sustainability strategy – and it is often not implemented.

There are several defined forms of washing which responsible brands should be wary of. They include:

- **Greenwashing**, which is a deceptive tactic to make brands appear more sustainable, eco-conscious and climate-aware than they actually are. According to a report by TerraChoice, over 98% of the 'green' products on the market are guilty of greenwashing. Examples are oil companies that over-emphasise their green initiatives while remaining the biggest contributors in terms of greenhouse emissions.

- **Bluewashing** is greenwashing's cousin and is the act of using social justice themes in marketing campaigns to create a positive image without taking meaningful action. Although some companies may genuinely support social justice causes, others 'blue wash' to make their brand look good without doing anything concrete. Rather than resorting to superficiality, brands should work on creating real change by working with people who have expertise on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

● Purplewashing

is when brands pick up gender themes, challenging gender stereotypes as a marketing tactic without walking the walk. There are a growing number of brands climbing on this bandwagon and supporting heightened awareness of feminist values. But here again, they support without bringing real changes in the way they operate. Organisations such as UN Women have excellent guidelines for corporates and brands wishing to navigate their way around becoming more woke.

3 A smart marketing opportunity to turn challenges into opportunities.

Claiming to be woke without walking the walk is a reputational risk for corporates and brands. Real change involves time and money and decreased profitability in the short term. This said, authentic wokeism can become a unique differentiator for brands in a hyper-competitive environment where functional differentiation is marginal at best.

There is a serious business case to be put up to Gen Z and Millennial consumers, who are willing to pay a premium for brands that are genuinely woke. No doubt this is a challenging path to navigate considering the current decreased purchasing power, declining economic indicators and little to no market growth. Nevertheless, great marketers have always been able to look past the immediate situation and stay ahead of the curve to achieve sustained

growth. Realistically speaking, there are some harmful consumer categories out there and the harm done by their consumption almost always outweighs the net good of their CSR activities. Yet, consumption of these products will continue as they are integral to today's modern lifestyle and the fact is that they do have the choice to explore alternative paths that are greener in the long term. What they certainly should not do is try to 'wash' things over through excessive self-projection as they risk being called out by consumer activist groups. Brands have a responsibility to 'awaken' and lead their organisations into becoming more woke and it is not only marketers, but many other stakeholders who need to engage in bringing about genuine and often costly process changes. The whole organisation needs to walk the talk, inside out in order to make it real.

4 Completing the transformation.

Authentic storytelling is better than super glossy and perfectly polished ad campaigns. Marketers need to keep their messaging real and avoid the pitfalls of over-promotion. They need to remember that they are talking to an audience that craves authenticity and connection with their evolving values more than ever before. ■

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Creativity in Crisis

Homogenisations and short-term approaches are plunging Pakistani creativity into a crisis, argues Arshad Awan.

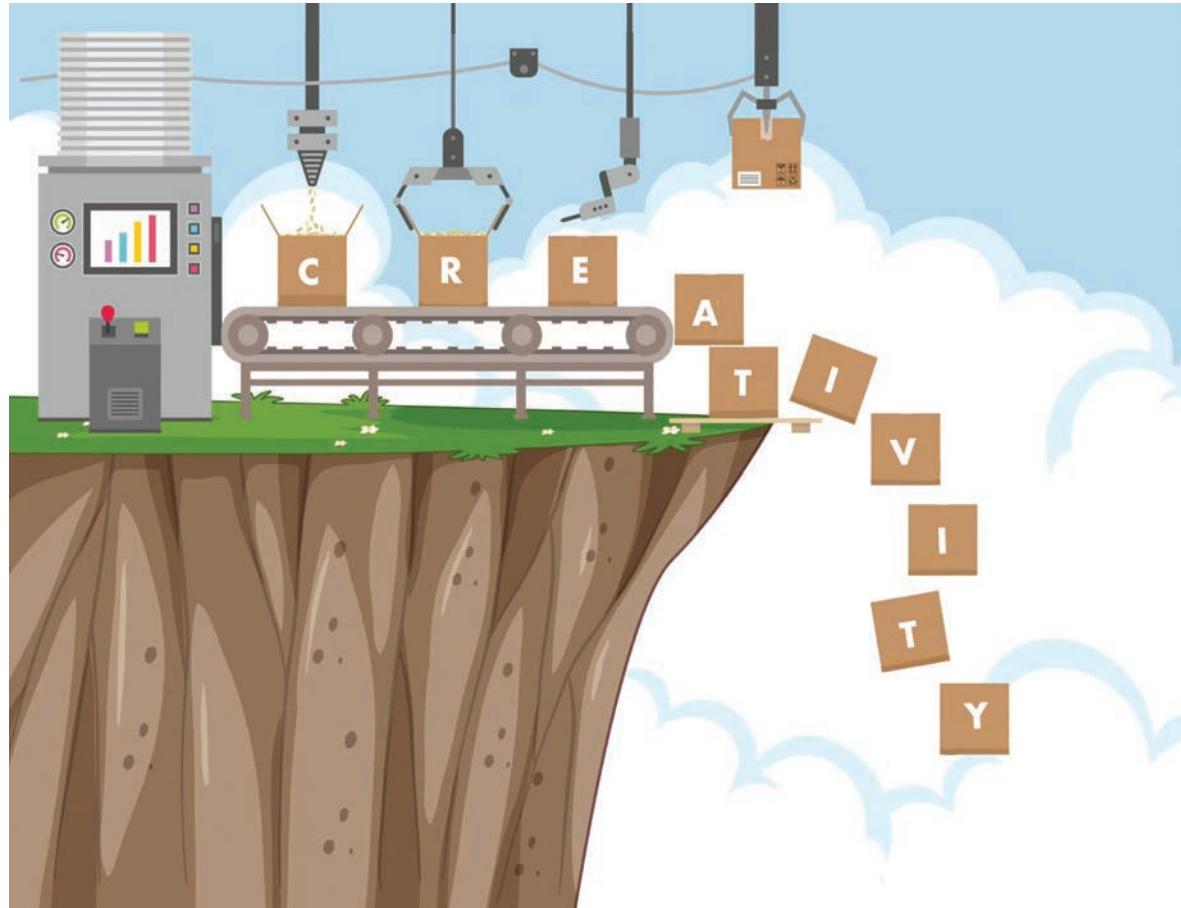
Pakistan's advertising landscape is dynamic and diverse – and yet, a lack of creative innovation and originality is being profusely felt, and the creativity crisis has become a worry among industry professionals. Advertising agencies lack the talent to generate and implement ideas, the account managers to maintain client satisfaction, and the technical personnel to track results and run digital campaigns.

Creativity is a fundamental aspect of advertising and is frequently regarded as the beating pulse of the industry. Originality, exemplified by divergence, novelty, singularity, or unpredictability, is the primary component of creativity. Diverse stimuli are more likely to be fascinating, intrinsically motivating and pleasurable to consumers.

Several factors contribute to Pakistan's creativity crisis including cultural constraints, risk aversion, budget limitations, lack of training, uneven client expectations, changing consumer behaviour, technological advancements and content saturation.

Pakistan is a culturally diverse country, requiring advertisers to carefully navigate cultural and social sensitivities. These sensitivities sometimes result in cautious and conservative creative choices to avoid controversy. While traditional media like TV and print still have significant reach in Pakistan, digital media has snowballed and advertisers often struggle between traditional and digital channels that require different creative approaches and strategies. Advertisers may face budget constraints, leading to limitations in terms of production quality and creative execution. This fact can impact their ability to create innovative and impactful campaigns.

Global advertising trends may influence advertisers in Pakistan (as they do elsewhere in the world), but finding the right balance between global trends and local sensibilities can be challenging, potentially leading to confusion on the creative direction. While there are talented individuals in the creative industry, there is a lack of formal education and training opportunities for creative professionals, and which can hinder the development of cutting-edge skills and innovative thinking. There is hardly any support for creative professionals through workshops, training programmes and networking events that can foster innovation and skill development. Pakistani



advertising lacks collaboration and diversity to encourage interaction between different teams and which can lead to more creative ideas.

The most debatable issue is the fact that advertisers often need to cater to their clients' expectations and which may not always align with pushing creative boundaries. This force fitting of creativity can sometimes limit the creative freedom of agencies. Clients and agencies focus more on short-term results and quick returns, leading to marketing campaigns that prioritise sales over long-term brand building. This approach leads to neglect of brand building, limited customer loyalty, reduced innovation and short-lived success. This lack of effectiveness is primarily due to the impact of a growing marketing culture that prioritises short-term results over long-term development and the ripple effects this has on strategy, creativity and media selection.

Emerging trends or shifts in the advertising landscape have also impacted the effectiveness of creative campaigns; for example, content saturation is making it harder for individual creative campaigns to stand out.

Evolving consumer behaviour and preferences are creating the impression that audiences have become more selective about the content they engage with. Add to this the short attention spans of digital consumers making it more difficult for creative ads to effectively convey their message within a limited time frame. Then there are the ad-blocking technologies and

banner blindness strategies that impact the visibility of creative ads online, reducing their effectiveness. Algorithm-driven platforms have also dented creativity, as many online platforms use algorithms to curate user content leading to an over-reliance on data at the expense of creativity and therefore to formulaic and uninspiring campaigns. The fear of backlash or controversy on social media may also discourage advertisers from taking creative risks, leading to safer and more conservative campaigns.

There is also strong evidence that the long-term efficacy of creatively awarded campaigns has diminished significantly and may have already fallen to the point where award-winning creativity provides little or no advantages in terms of effectiveness. Advertising awards are mostly questionable and less transparent in their grants.

The homogenisation of content is a big creative concern as it can make it difficult for individual creative ads to break through. This homogenisation is often expressed through factors such as market saturation, ad fatigue, lack of differentiation, creative inertia, loss of brand identity, and audience boredom.

Many advertisers use similar themes and designs causing saturation; consumers end up seeing the same visual and thematic language across several campaigns. Consumers get tired of seeing the same visuals or messages in commercials and this 'familiarity' can make individuals ignore ads or tune out as a part of ad fatigue.

Homogenisation also occurs when brands adhere to industry standards and best practices too closely. This approach may give brands a sense of credibility but it does not differentiate them. When a topic or style becomes popular, other advertisers copy it, stifling creativity. Brands that follow industry conventions risk losing their distinctiveness. Consumers find it hard to identify brands when all their communication feels the same. Consumers engage more with advertising that surprises, entertains, or informs. Predictable campaigns may fail to engage audiences.

The creativity crisis in advertising underscores the need for a paradigm shift. As we navigate the evolving landscapes of consumer engagement, technology and culture, advertisers and marketers must embrace creativity as an enduring solution. Creativity is the compass that guides brands toward lasting connections, innovation and relevance. Creativity is the differentiator, the catalyst that sparks emotions and the foundation for building brand legacies. Creativity is not an obstacle to short-term goals; it is the bridge to long-term success.

As the industry faces a creative crisis, it needs to harness the transformative power of creative thinking. Although challenges exist, it is worth noting that there are instances of remarkable creativity in Pakistan's advertising landscape. ■

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Making the World More Beautiful

Sara Jamil reflects on the gifts that graphic design brings into our worlds.

I designed my first business card as a graphic designer in 1999. Even then, a time steeped in the classic agency culture and *Mad Men*-like politics, I struggled with what title to give myself. I wanted one that would encompass all that graphic design stood for and applied to. Twenty-five years later, as robots start taking over my expertise, inserting doubt in the existence of my own worth, I remain just as stumped regarding encapsulating all I do, despite having a portfolio that spans concept development, strategy, visual and UI design.

A few weeks ago, I was asked to make a presentation to a bunch of budding communication design students and talk about the less travelled path I have taken with my work. I was nervous in the way only someone with acute Graphic Designer Imposter Syndrome can be. In a room full of Canvassavvy Gen Zers, my own roster of design experience felt dated, and my role rather dead compared to what an app can do in less than one-tenth the time.

Like any craft that has to keep up with rapid changes, the role of graphic design is also worth examining, unpacking and redefining. Have we forgotten the basic core of where it started? Or lost track of how 'graphic design' has birthed a multitude of careers? As someone plugged into the chatter around design, I heard the whisperings about the impending demise of graphic design become louder as the titles became, at the same time, more expansive and specific.

The desire to define particular talents under the broad framework of graphic design has become the need of the hour, especially as free software, apps, downloadable vectors and more accessible tech make their way into design circles. It certainly seems as if everyone can equip themselves with a template and a title – leading to market saturation in terms of graphic design expertise. As somewhat of a purist, I have held on to the mast of the graphic design sail, although I am perhaps one of a diminishing pool of people that still believes that the role of the

graphic designer in human form will continue to stand its ground, and even flourish.

Saul Bass, arguably one of the top graphic designers of this era, said: "Design is thinking made visual;" and as the world hurtles towards a place where man and AI are competing neck-to-neck, it may bode well to remember to whom this art of "thinking" originally belongs and emanates from.

Graphic design involves critical thinking, creativity as well as the ability to understand and visually share nuanced, complex messages. Skill and intuition remain at the forefront of the exercise, more so in a world where the message has to cut through the clutter and remain easy to process. In this respect, if led by design thinking, AI can help, and which is why many graphic designers are incorporating AI tools into their workflows to enhance their productivity and explore possibilities that will complement and augment their abilities.

A few years ago, I attended a design conference in Islamabad and had the opportunity

to meet Stefan Sagmeister, whose talk *Happiness by Design* played a key role in the development of my own design sensibility – and it was something he said in his talk, about our jobs as designers being to make the world a more beautiful place, that lit up all kinds of neurons in me, piquing my interest into why our brains respond better when we see aesthetically sound solutions. This led me to taking a deep dive into reading more about why good design and graphics are a positive stimulus and down the rabbit hole of neuroscience and to the exploratory works of Donald Norman, an American researcher known for his book *The Design of Everyday Things*. In the book, Norman writes that when we look at something pleasing, our brain shifts into "positive effect," which is connected to the release of endorphins. Norman's research looked at the way problem-solving and emotions are connected and how the "right" or "wrong" set of feelings (in response to visual or external stimuli) changes our cognitive system, either

by revving it up or slowing it down. We see this in our daily life when the more anxious we are, the less successful we become in engaging productively with our environment.

Norman writes: "Attractive things make people feel good, which in turn allows neurons to fire better and thought processes to improve." As many studies on the subject have put forth, the act of making a decision is emotional, regardless of whether we choose to make it consciously or subconsciously. Our responses to our environment can be complex and determining in how we react to what we experience, and given the increasingly chaotic nature of our lives, we need appealing solutions to thrive and live meaningful lives.

Graphic design, once the foundation of a rather structured career path, started out as a powerful but simple medium. However, with the growth of technological advances, graphic design has had to grow many tentacles in order to reach out to a future that encompasses entire universes of visual communication and which include media, education and culture. Today, graphic design transcends digital as well as social and aesthetic innovation, proving once again that a world without it would be far less beautiful. ■

Sara Jamil is a freelance designer and currently teaches typography at IVS. jam.designs@gmail.com



A Few of my Fav's

By
Batool Habib
Curnally

Bonus Tristar – Dumdaar Dhulai

Agency: Spectrum VMLY&R

With a dash of humour, *nand-bhabi nok jhok* and most importantly, *dumdaar dhulai*, Bonus Tristar does it again. Following its earlier hit 'Bonus Mila', this recent ad of Bonus Tristar has me. The dramatic moments are insightful, well-timed and create great engagement; from the gasp of the first splash, the smug superiority of the *nand*, to the moment one thinks matters are about to come to blows via the ad's quip on '*dhulai*' – this ad drives home the message of *dumdaar dhulai*, with Bonus Tristar saving the day.



Sabhyata – Diwali #RedefiningCelebration

Agency: P se Picture

In celebrating womanhood, Sabhyata takes the path of compassion, empathy and kindness to demonstrate how the older generation paves the way for the new to progress in the workplace. Truly redefining celebration, this beautifully crafted, insightful ad tugs at the heartstrings and speaks volumes about the realities of challenging the biases against women in the workplace. For the protagonist, in her vulnerability lies her strength. Young female professionals in South Asia can only dream of meeting their version of an incredible boss like Sheeba Chadha, who continues to astound with her gift for acting.



PathKind Labs – #HumFarkNahinKarte

Agency: SG Dream Media

"Illness doesn't choose which home to go in and neither do we." There is no greater care we can offer humanity than to serve with dignity and kindness – a message that is modelled by PathKind Labs in their #HumFarkNahinKarte campaign, as they highlight the alarming statistic that 98% of transgender people are either abandoned or given away. Challenging biases against the marginalised, PathKind Labs demonstrates their commitment to go beyond the call of duty without any care for '*log kya kahenge*'. This ad speaks to my heart – it holds up a mirror to society's attitudes by showing the utmost respect for humanity and bringing forward the heart-breaking plight of little children who are abandoned.



EFU Life – Aaj Ko Manao

Agency: MullenLowe Rauf

EFU Life's ad 'Aaj Ko Manao' is all about living in the moment, while choosing a secure future that promises savings and protection. The ad is relatable to a wide audience through the scenarios it highlights; quality time with family, playing cricket, celebrating parents' achievements and giving them the assurance that they too can now take it easy. The scenario I appreciated the most was the one that highlighted the importance of allowing oneself moments of rest and relaxation. This ad is a welcome reminder – an inward sigh of relief – of the importance of taking a breather from the stress of daily life.

uniteThings



TUC – Blame the Bhook x Cricket

Agency: IAL Saatchi & Saatchi

In Pakistan, cricket is a beloved sport. In those moments, tensions are palpable as everyone sits huddled around the TV erupting into shrieks of frustration or jubilation. TUC has successfully used humour to encapsulate these tensions.

I loved the use of ASMR to emphasise biting into that TUC biscuit – that crispy crunch that is so comforting and familiar you can almost taste it. With instrumental music representing the traditional TUC *Halki Phulki Bhook* jingle, and timely cues to amplify each sound, this ad makes one feel like one is sitting right there watching the match. The tension between the couple unfolds, ending in cherished moments of laughter.



Surreal Cereal – (Fake) Celebrity Endorsement

Agency: Onwards

Cheeky, clever and brilliant – there simply aren't enough good things I can say about Surreal Cereal – a quirky UK-based high-protein, low-carb, zero-sugar cereal brand – and its marketing tactics. This outdoor campaign had me in stitches – at first glance, it all looks like regular celebrity endorsements... until you read the fine print. Imagine the ingenuity of leveraging the names of ordinary people who just happen to share the same name with famous personalities – and without incurring exorbitant costs. 'Dwayne Johnson' is a London bus driver, 'Serena Williams' is a student, and 'Michael Jordan' is an average person from St Albans. A budget-friendly way to get attention that truly delivers the best possible bang for their buck!



The Up Collection | Sapphire x 7Up

Agency: Alt Story & BBPR

Edgy, bold, vibrant, chic – the Up Collection is a visual smorgasbord of 7Up's brand identity coming to life in a clothing range for today's Gen Z. Adding designer flair to everyday wear, this fun and aesthetically pleasing collaboration between 7Up and Sapphire West embodies abstract patterns, minimalist looks and bold colours, with branding to add that little extra oomph. Modern and sophisticated, this ad encourages young people to embrace their individuality and be real in the moment. I love the flamboyance and flair.



Unilever Pakistan – Living Wages for #LiveableIndependence

Agency: Alt Story

Galloping inflation has been crushing for everyone in Pakistan, but none more so than people struggling to survive on their paltry minimum wages. Putting this issue under the spotlight, Unilever highlights the simple fact that the minimum wage needs to equal a liveable wage, challenging participants to consider how they could meet their own needs on a Rs 32,000 budget. This is an insightful, thought-provoking and eye-opening public awareness campaign. I appreciate Unilever's way of using this experiment as a launch pad for change, speaking for those whose voices often go unnoticed. ■

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Hyundai Lahore	042-35404222-5	Hyundai Oasis - Multan	061-4540377	Hyundai South - Karachi	021-35115581-5
Hyundai City Store - Lahore	042-32592245	Hyundai Chenab - Multan	061-6521100	Hyundai Boulevard - Karachi	021-36640704-7
Hyundai Central - Lahore	0315-2368725	Hyundai DG Khan	0325-1144777	Hyundai Quetta	081-2471823-5
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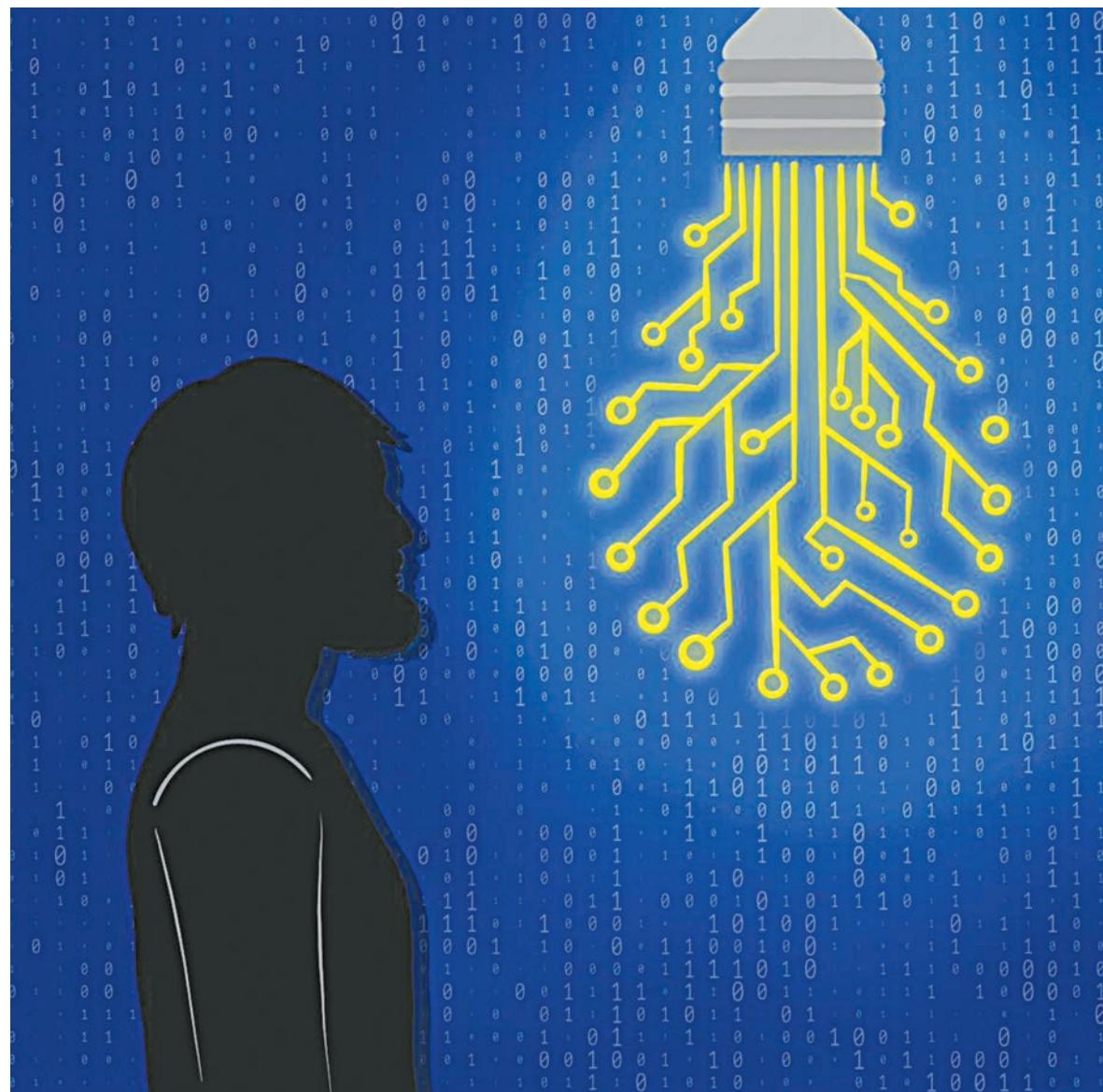
The full impact of generative AI on advertising and brand communications is still too early to gauge, writes Khurram Mahmoob.

Post pandemic and we are in a different world. Covid-19 not only increased the pace of digital transformation, it triggered an acceleration in the development of new tools, one of which was the release of OpenAI's generative AI tool ChatGPT in November 2022.

ChatGPT's long-form human-like responses based on text inputs ignited a FOMO wave that led to it attracting over one million users in a mere two months, rekindling all the hype around AI among investors, the public and the media. Since then, several other generative AI tools have surfaced, triggering 'breakout' Google searches for Alphabet's Bard and Baidu's Ernie, the moment their launch announcements were made. This in turn gave stimulus to select Mega-cap tech stocks, leading Nvidia, Alphabet, Meta, and Microsoft to outperform the S&P 500 Index. Nvidia, for example, with its lead in producing chips capable of performing complex AI tasks reached one trillion dollars' market value this June.

AI, of course, is not a new concept and actually dates to the fifties, when Alan Turing conceived the possibility of machine intelligence and introduced 'the Turing test' to assess a machine's ability to demonstrate intelligent behaviour. The sixties witnessed initial investments in the field, resulting in one of the world's first AI chatbots, known as Eliza. The late nineties/early 2000s saw further AI innovation thanks to breakthroughs made in computational power and the rise of the tech sector and by 2010 AI went mainstream when big tech started integrating AI technologies in their products. It was during those years that people started to really see the magic of AI through machine learning (ML), so that the most iconic post-2000 brands – Google, Meta, Amazon, Uber, LinkedIn and TikTok – rely on algorithmic cues that leverage ML to accomplish a host of tasks.

Generative AI uses various techniques, including neural networks and deep learning algorithms to identify patterns and generate new outcomes, and differs from traditional AI in two main ways. Firstly, it is capable of generating new content in the form of text, image, video, audio and code, unlike traditional AI systems which train computers to make predictions about human behaviour, business outcomes and so on. Secondly, it allows humans to communicate with computers in their natural language; something never done before, as traditionally, computers were prompted using programming languages. The implications of generative AI on personal and professional



productivity are tremendous for the simple reason that if computers can generate quality content, human beings will be able to spend more time on higher value-added activities. In this respect, generative AI is a jump-start opportunity for start-ups, and small and medium sized businesses which can now become faster and smarter in the way they work.

Generative AI is still in the early phases of its ability to disrupt the ABC (advertising, brand, communications) ecosystem. Presently, it can enhance creativity, personalisation, efficiency and data-driven decision-making, and personalised content creation, audience segmentation and targeting, real-time social media engagement, sentiment analysis and content optimisation are all high level achievable goals. However, what still has to be done is to unlock and integrate AI values into different processes and move it beyond 'prompting'.

There can be arguing that businesses that know how to wield the power of generative AI will be the ones that will move ahead. However, the speed of change is also bringing with it both overwhelming choices and the constant challenges of ensuring the ethical use of AI, and in this respect, it would be prudent that adoption strategies begin small and then scale up. It would be true to say that right

now the ABC ecosystem is still in the capabilities assessment phase in terms of data flows, the technology infrastructure and the quality of the human resources, and of the existing tools. It would also be true to say that most ABC companies are looking to AI for its productivity-enhancing capabilities, a state of affairs that is leading to fears that AI will become a threat to existing jobs – although this is not necessarily true, because if integrated correctly, AI will extend human creativity and intelligence – not replace it.

In the long run, generative AI will bring important strategic values to the table in terms of creative processes, marketing efforts, and customer experiences. However, in order to do so, AI will require a reimagining of the corporate culture and the existing skill sets. This could well take the shape of a transformation in the dynamics of advertiser-agency engagement, the introduction of specialised roles, disruption in organisational design and changes in the remuneration model. This in turn will unlock complex ethical, privacy and compliance issues and specialised knowledge skills will be required to navigate the ethical use of AI, including concerns about data privacy, bias in algorithms and transparency in ad targeting. In fact, the more ubiquitous the technology becomes, the greater

will be the need to remain vigilant about issues of user privacy and trust.

To conclude, there is no doubt that AI is a game-changing force for transformation and disruption, and rather than view it with suspicion, we should perceive AI as giving human imagination, creativity and intelligence a co-pilot that can lead us to endless possibilities. However, it is too early to accurately sketch the future of this technology, especially given the risks, considerations and concerns underlying it – and no, we cannot expect generative AI to predict this future. However, as the technology progresses (and at breakneck speed), we must be prepared for a fundamental shift in the way we accomplish many tasks, although I personally anticipate there will be more than a few years of transition. In a way it seems we are back in the nineties when the internet burst upon the scene, and although at the time there was a fair share of enthusiasts for what was then known as the information superhighway – it took more than a decade for the internet's real potential and value to become both apparent and accessible. ■

Khurram Mahboob has been contributing to the GCC region's tech, media and technology sector for the last 17 years. He is based in the UAE. khurram.mahboob@gmail.com



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پرافٹریٹس:

Beauty and South Asia tend to go hand in hand. The pursuit of beauty is ingrained in South Asian existence and has long been a way of living. From textiles to skincare to clothing and grooming, every act is conducted with the conscious need of keeping beauty at the forefront.

Born and bred in Karachi, 40-year-old Mina Salman, like millions of other women, grew up with beauty as a core element of the *desi* girl experience in Pakistan. "I was very much inclined towards beauty despite the fact that there were very few avenues when it came to exploring beauty concepts, although that did not prevent me from wanting to experiment with things like makeup."

Fresh faced, flawless skin, a mane of flowing hair and a youthful glow that defies her age, Salman, founder of Bagallery, is a vision. Although she exudes a calm persona, I sense that underneath lies a fun, bubbly personality ready to shine through.

Salman began her career at Mindshare as a media planner. In 2007, she married and relocated to Saudi Arabia and in 2008 she gave birth to her son. "I wanted to continue with my career, but the opportunities were limited for mothers returning to work after having a baby. Eventually, I thought about delving into the world of e-commerce."

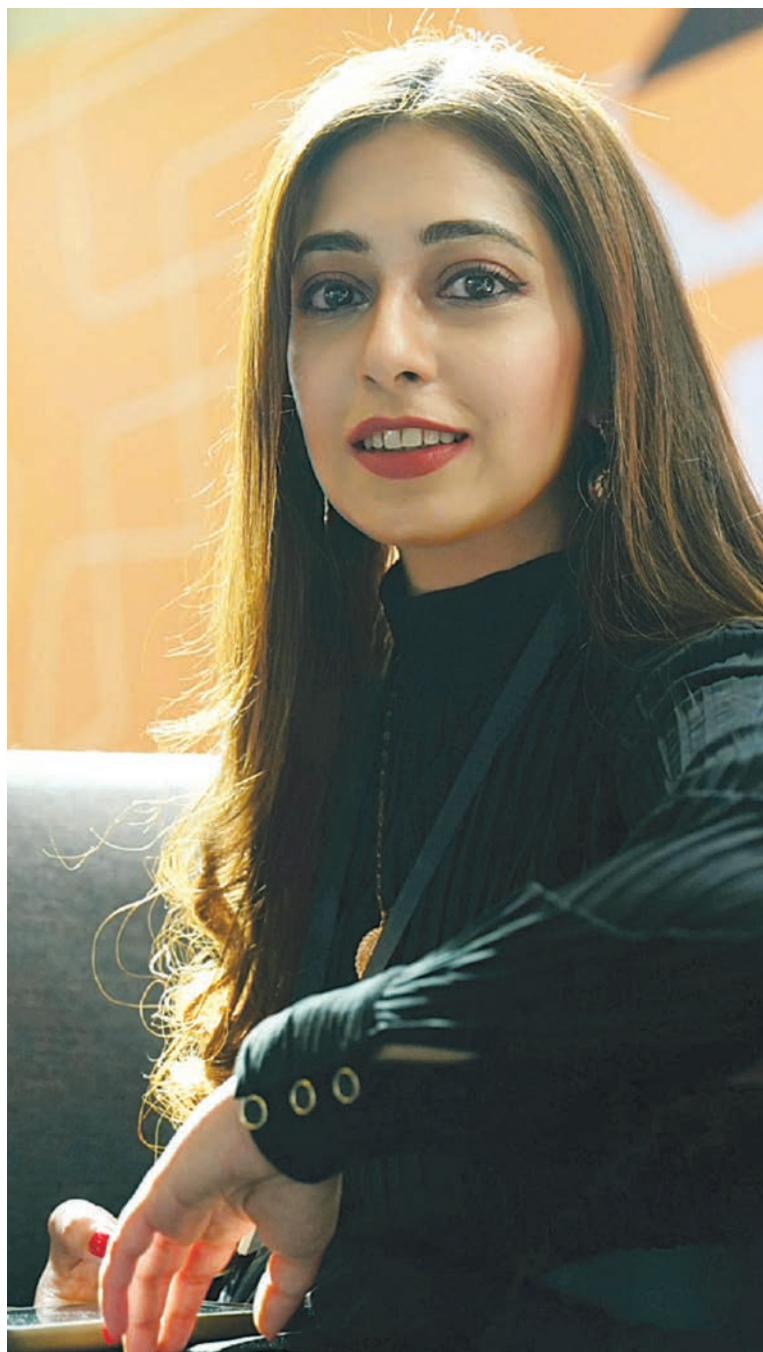
At the time e-commerce was still an emerging trend in the region, but this did not deter Salman from indulging in an activity she clearly enjoyed – shopping – and eventually she and her husband decided to build an e-commerce platform that would sell luxury handbags sourced from the US, UK and Europe. They named their e-commerce business Bagallery, and Salman and her husband went from being a married couple to becoming business partners as well, embarking together in the great unknown of a fast-evolving digital realm.

They soon learn their first lesson; the luxury business, no matter how big or small, is intrinsically risky because the orders tend to be sporadic and there is always a degree of uncertainty regarding when the next order will come through. Salman also realised that if she was going to be successful, she would have to step out of her comfort zone. "Your customers are not going to be your friends and family. You have to get out into the open sea and swim in it."

By this time, the couple had moved from Saudi Arabia to Dubai and this was when she truly began to sparkle. "Saudi was a dark box and in those days wearing the *abaya* was still a must and although everything was open and vibrant, life in a compound had its challenges, including its seclusion from the rest of the city. Dubai is my home now and I love the life and convenience it provides," and with greater freedom and independence, Salman was able to indulge her interest in beauty more fully.

Sitting Pretty

M. Hussain profiles Mina Salman, Founder, Bagallery.



Then in 2017, two things happened. Beauty blogger and entrepreneur Huda Kattan burst upon the scene and social media took over the business of beauty. It was at this point that Bagallery decided to include beauty products in their portfolio of offerings. "People were exposed to new brands such as Too Faced, Huda Beauty, Tarte and The Ordinary – and they wanted to buy these products."

However, despite beauty being a core element of the Pakistani woman's identity, the commodification of beauty on a large scale in Pakistan remained untapped, with hardly any players venturing into the idea of packaging beauty as a product. But then along came social media and the emergence of 'influencers', and the game changed. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube acted as links between beauty products and their potential customers, teaching them how to use products, perfect makeup techniques and learn about skincare.

Initially, Bagallery offered their imported shoes, handbags and beauty items from a single site, but to grow and scale,

Salman realised that she needed to partner with local brands. She also understood there was a need to get 'personal' with her clients and started to 'converse' with them through *BeauteousBlog* (instagram.com/thebeauteousblog).

Introducing personal elements such as her own love for makeup and for exploring skin care products – and her love of shopping – she started to build personal relationships with her clients, busting beauty myths and talking about her own experiences with various products. Rather than just sales, the focus was on establishing connections on the basis of a shared love of beauty. "I am extremely passionate about beauty not only as a business; I also like to study it and dissect skincare ingredients and understand what makes them beneficial for us."

In 2020, Bagallery secured their first VC funding and in 2021 the second round came through. This said, the journey was far from easy. "The fundraising process is intensive and it took eight to nine months of back and forth, putting together the numbers, doing

the evaluations, handling the legal aspects and passing the due diligence."

Despite Bagallery's success, Salman points out that 90% of sales in Pakistan are done on a cash on delivery basis. "People don't trust businesses and they want the product in hand before paying for it." She adds that a lot of the growth within the beauty category is now fuelled by the access that beauty apps provide to users to experiment from the comfort of their homes and the increasing number of content creators who focus on what works for whom and on new product launches and trends. However, at the end of the day, the secret to the success of a beauty-based business is authenticity and the reason why Bagallery has managed to maintain consistent growth.

Comfort is something which Salman puts a great deal of emphasis on in terms of living a life of value. Her interests revolve around building a life that fuels the nourishment of the mind, body and soul. Cooking, working out, creating content for her blog and focusing on self-care are how she unwinds and relaxes.

Having mastered the digital space, the future surprisingly is going towards brick-and-mortar. This partly stems from the "original shopping experience" which many people in Pakistan enjoy. The joy of going to a physical store and experiencing products in terms of touch and feel, seeing how the colours of makeup work on one's skin and actually applying the products.

"In March 2022 we held a huge GlamFest in Karachi at the Expo Centre and we converted our entire website into a 'mall' by collaborating with local players like WB by Hemani, Sara Salon, Conatural and working with beauty influencers. We repeated this concept in Lahore and in both cases, the response was mind-blowing and people just loved it. So much so, that we are now considering a brick-and-mortar presence in the shape of pop-ups."

Bagallery has come a long way from being a fashion brand to becoming a beauty institution. And to think it all started off with an act – shopping – which many people dismiss as a frivolous activity without realising the potential it can have in a developing country with a young population like Pakistan. Today Bagallery is the leading e-commerce site for all things related to beauty and fashion. Looking at Salman today, it is clear that she has managed to strike the balance between work and play. A mix of beauty and brains, Mina Salman is sitting pretty. ■

M. Hussain is a Dubai-based freelance writer.

"**P**eople are reading the Kohli-Shadab friendship story more than the one about the rising cost of our electricity bills," noted a sub-editor, looking at the numbers on the screen.

His surprise was understandable given that newsrooms all over the world (and for good reason) prioritise stories that impact their readers' everyday lives. The core purpose of journalism is to inform, and make sure readers stay informed. The core value, meanwhile, is to tell the truth, or as close to the truth as is possible, for the media today.

But the truth is not one-dimensional. It should not and does not only have to do with politics, the economy and security. It also has to do with a story as simple as two players from rival teams bonding on and off the field. That is as much a reality as a report on a cricket match or the foreign office's statement on Pakistan-India relations. Yet, where would this story fall, if a newsroom had to rank all three in order of priority?

More and more we see audiences turn away from 'hard news.' Something as crucial to the country as the date of the next general elections now fails to garner attention the way it would have done a year ago. A story on a lion roaming the streets of Karachi becomes the top-most read story while the caretaker prime minister's statement on the steps taken to counter inflation lingers somewhere on the fourth or fifth spot – if that.

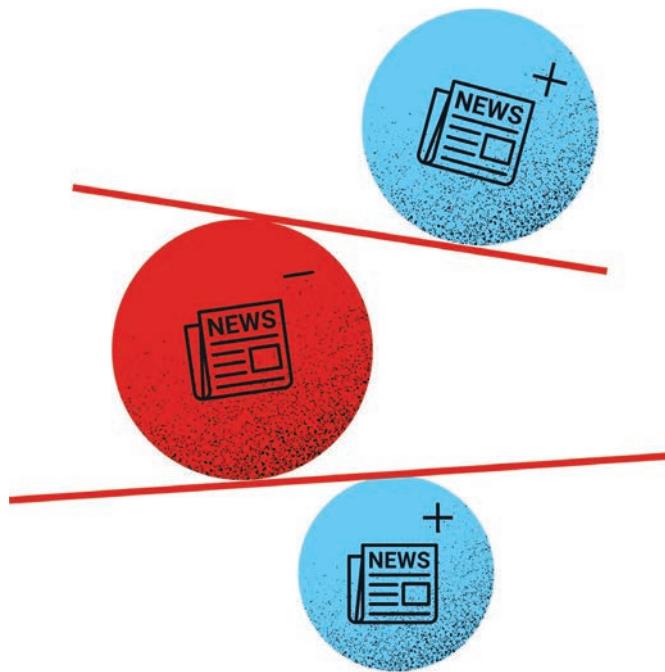
There are multiple reasons behind the changes in audiences' behaviour regarding how they consume news – the dominance of social media, disillusionment with state affairs, and even the holiday seasons. However, here I am going to talk about the culprit that is 'bad news.' No doubt, bad news can be subjective; for example, the stock market going up or down can be a good or bad thing for different people. So, for the sake of clarity, 'bad news' in this article will refer to content that is seen as bad or negative – the kind that makes people turn away from the news, and I am not only talking about people in Pakistan. Last year, a Reuters Institute Digital News Report based on data from six continents and 46 markets noted that the proportion of news consumers who say they avoid news often or sometimes has increased sharply. Selective avoidance had doubled over the year, with many respondents reporting that news had a negative effect on their well-being. This growing aversion to the news (most of the time it is bad) is a very real condition and one that media outlets must not only acknowledge but address.

As a reader, how many boxes would you tick on this list?

- You feel you are stuck in a loop of terrible headlines
- Your mood dips by the time you are done catching up on news
- You have trouble dealing with the negativity in the news

What's Wrong With Good News?

Pakistani newsrooms need to rebalance their quotients of bad versus good news, or risk permanently alienating their readers, argues Zahrah Mazhar.



- You want to shy away from the news but feel guilty that you are burying your head in the sand
- You have stopped checking the news as frequently as before because you feel overwhelmed
- You feel bombarded with information via social media, friends, and WhatsApp
- You feel the media only has negative things to report

Reducing news consumption is the most obvious solution – but it poses a predicament for journalists who rely on readers wanting to stay informed in order to do their job. So the question editors and publishers need to ask themselves is, how can they focus on the good when the bad and ugly are unavoidable?

- **Don't make bad things worse:** Start by acknowledging that bad news gets traction – stock phrases such as "if it bleeds it leads" or "bad news sells", have been around for decades, so accept that the media often milks bad news (effectively earning itself a bad rep), and then resist the temptation to play up the intensity of the story. For example, in May 2020, when a PIA plane crashed in Karachi, several media outlets ran an audio conversation between the pilot and the air traffic controllers that took place moments before the crash – and at a time when the search for survivors was still going on. Such actions compound the effect of the bad news, and given that in Pakistan the nature and the scale of the bad news itself matter (the fatigue is so widespread that if the violence is not gory enough, it may not even catch people's attention or garner their empathy), one has to question the motivation behind running such an audio.

effects of bad news. During the pandemic, Dawn ran a "Good News" digital segment to keep up a sense of hope among its readers. A woman watching her grandchildren wave to her outside her window or a nurse narrating a story of how a child made it through the night – these stories were a way of reducing the heaviness from headlines that were mostly racking up the numbers of casualties.

- **Consciously look for good news:** As part of the news cycle, journalists do not have the time to think about the presence or absence of 'positive news' – and that is where the problem lies. We have to actively think about what we can do to counter the hyper-connected news updates. The question I asked earlier: 'How can we focus on the good when the bad is unavoidable?', should be asked periodically as a reminder to newsrooms to make conscious efforts to find feel-good stories. I am not suggesting they concoct such stories or cut down on negative news in order to shine a light on the positive ones, but I am suggesting that they have to dedicate time and resources to finding these stories, which thanks to social media, are there for anyone who cares to look for them.

A Dubai based editor made the point that putting out something uplifting was part of their daily agenda: "If we don't have an article for the day that will leave readers feeling happy, we use our social media platforms to share a light-hearted account of someone from the city. Global stories don't always work because people need to see themselves or their community represented to really connect." This approach means digging through social media in pursuit of happy ledes and sending reporters into the field with a clear brief: a focus on community journalism.

Coming back to cricket, during one Pakistan-India match in the Asia Cup, the internet was full of talk not about the players or the rain, but about a woman who brought along an entire *daig* (pot) of *biryani*. Now, imagine if one of the many reporters there had actually gone and talked to her to find out a little bit more about the who, why, what and how – wouldn't that have been a fun article to read amidst stories about court hearings, a politician who may or may not return to Pakistan, and predictions of a further hike in the price of fuel? While all three stories had to be covered, the story of one woman and her *biryani* would have brought something lighter to audiences already prone to switching off due to their weariness of hard news. Such stories can make readers linger on the homepage five seconds longer, rather than closing the browser five seconds earlier – and that extra time is surely worth putting in the extra effort from our end. ■

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Capturing *Dil, Dimagh* and Market Share

In an attention span compromised world, only influencer marketing will work, argues Ad Mad Dude.

In today's hyper-digital world, where the average attention span is shorter than the lifespan of a Snapchat story, businesses find themselves in an endless quest for innovative ways to connect with their ever-elusive target audience. Traditional advertising channels, once the reliable workhorses of marketing, now resemble dusty relics in the digital museum. (Well not exactly, but I just wanted to make it more dramatic.) *Kyun?* Because there is a new SHO in town, and its name is influencer marketing. In this article, we will take a tongue-in-cheek rickshaw ride through the exciting, mind-bending and riveting world of influencer marketing, exploring how it is giving traditional advertising a run for its money and why it has become the cool Gen Z kid on the marketing block.

Let's briefly talk about the nostalgia of traditional advertising. Billboards towering over highways, radio jingles haunting our dreams, TV commercials (the good, the bad and the ugly) strategically interrupting our favourite show and, let's not forget, the glossy print ads that double as table coasters. These time-tested methods had their charm, but now find themselves in an existential crisis (just like me and the interim Government of Pakistan).

Enter influencer marketing, the fresh-faced rebel. It is like that new student who shows up at school with spiked hair and an unconventional style and instantly captivates everyone's attention. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing doesn't come with the baggage of predictability. It is spontaneous, real, and far from the rehearsed monotony of traditional ads. Okay, I'm being dramatic again – we have our share of done-to-death influencer marketers, but you get the point.

Traditional advertising often feels like a bad *rishta* date that overshares because they are desperately trying to convince you that they are the one. Consumers, however, have evolved into discerning sceptics who don't believe in love at first sight (or first ad). They yearn for authenticity and trust; they want more than just flashy promises. Traditional advertising often resembles a fishing expedition, casting a massive net and hoping to catch something – anything. It's like throwing a birthday party open to everyone in town. Sure, there is a chance someone might show up, but it's hardly efficient. Influencer marketing, on the other hand, is the precision-guided *amma ki jooti* of the advertising world. Influencers, with their "real person" vibe and down-to-earth recommendations, are the antidote to scepticism. They are like the cool dost you turn to for advice because they have 'been there, done that.' When the right influencer endorses a product, it feels like a personal recommendation from a friend, and who can resist the charm of peer pressure in the digital age?

Brands can meticulously select influencers whose followers align with their target demographics and interests. It's like finding your soulmate in a room full of strangers. This precise targeting results in higher engagement rates, making traditional advertising's catch-and-release strategy seem like a bad fishing analogy. And this is what the brand teams need to understand – your favourite influencer may not be the right one for your brand, so try to keep the wanting to take a selfie with your crush in check, and make the right choice.

Influencer marketing is not a passing trend; it is the rebellious teenager who has moved into the marketing house and refuses to leave the basement. Here's why it's here to stay.



Irfan Junejo



Hamza Bhatti



Junaid Akram



Ali Ishtiaq

- **Asli storytelling:** Influencers have a knack for crafting engaging stories around products, making them relatable and memorable. It's like reading a bedtime *kahani* with the protagonist as your favourite influencer and the moral of the story is to buy the product. The Original Gangster: Mr Irfan Junejo – www.instagram.com/irfanjunejo/

- **Building bharosa:** In the digital age, trust is rarer than a unicorn sighting. Influencers, however, have buckets of it. Brands can ride the trust wave and bask in the glory of credibility all thanks to their influencer BFFs. The *bhai* of content: Hamza Bhatti – www.instagram.com/hamzathebhatti

- **Real-time feedback:** In the fast-paced world of digital marketing, real-time feedback is like gold dust. Influencer marketing offers brands instant feedback, helping them to adapt and improve their offerings faster than you can say "viral video." The Bald and the Beautiful: Junaid Akram – www.instagram.com/ganjiswag

- **Content Creation:** Influencers are content creation *kai ustaads*, churning out a steady stream of fresh and engaging content for their campaigns. It's like having your own personal content factory without the assembly line monotony. Content *ka* doctor: Ali Ishtiaq aka Doc Ali – www.instagram.com/doc.ali

- **Budget dost:** Compared to traditional advertising, influencer marketing often offers a more budget-friendly way to reach a highly engaged audience. It's like finding a designer dress at a thrift store – a rare deal that feels like winning the lottery. Every other influencer vs the monthly cost for billboards? A concern is measuring the impact of influencer marketing accurately – and it's like trying to weigh a cloud; it looks fluffy, but where is the scale? However, with the right tools and strategies, these challenges are easy to overcome.

Brands can measure influencer marketing success through key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement, click-through rates, conversions and the growth of their own social media following. It's like deciphering a secret code, but once cracked, it reveals the ROI treasure chest.

Influencer marketing is not just changing the game; it is rewriting the entire rulebook in emojis. As we look ahead, brace yourself for even wilder innovations. From micro-influencers with niche appeal to virtual influencers created through AI, the landscape is evolving faster than a tweet in a celebrity feud.

The regulatory environment surrounding influencer marketing is also getting a makeover. Governments and watchdogs are imposing stricter guidelines on transparency, ensuring that audiences are informed when content is sponsored. It's like the referee showing a yellow card in a soccer match – a necessary step to keep things fair.

Influencer marketing is not a fad; it is a full-blown revolution. It's the cool kid at the party who everyone wants to hang out with. Brands that embrace influencer marketing are not just keeping up with the times; they are leading the parade, wearing the trendiest outfits and hogging the photo booth.

As we venture into the future, one thing is certain: change is the only constant. Influencer marketing will continue to evolve, pushing the boundaries of creativity and effectiveness. For businesses, the choice is clear: adapt to the influencer marketing revolution or risk being left behind in the digital dust.

In a world where attention is the most precious commodity, influencer marketing has proven itself the key to capturing *dil, dimagh* and market share. Are you ready to RSVP to the influencer marketing party? It is after all shaping up to be the trendiest soirée in town. ■

*Ad Mad Dude runs the eponymous Facebook page.
admaddude@gmail.com*

Marc Pritchard, Chief Brand Officer at P&G, is well placed to detect an important shift in consumer sentiment. Here is what he said at the Cannes Festival this year: "We need to convey performance or benefits. [We are] getting back to the fundamentals. I think in today's world, moving into areas of advocacy that are outside of your brand's wheelhouse, that's where things can get undone."

There are plenty of cautionary examples. Try googling "anti-woke backlash" for a sample. It produces opinion pieces like: "Why Americans are sick of woke marketing." Brands burnishing their green credentials, for example, are all too easily undone by images of the CEO boarding a private jet. They get caught in a social media pile on, especially in the US, where cultural wars are running hot right now. The risks of being caught out as a hypocritical virtue signaller now outweigh the benefits of promoting your social purpose.

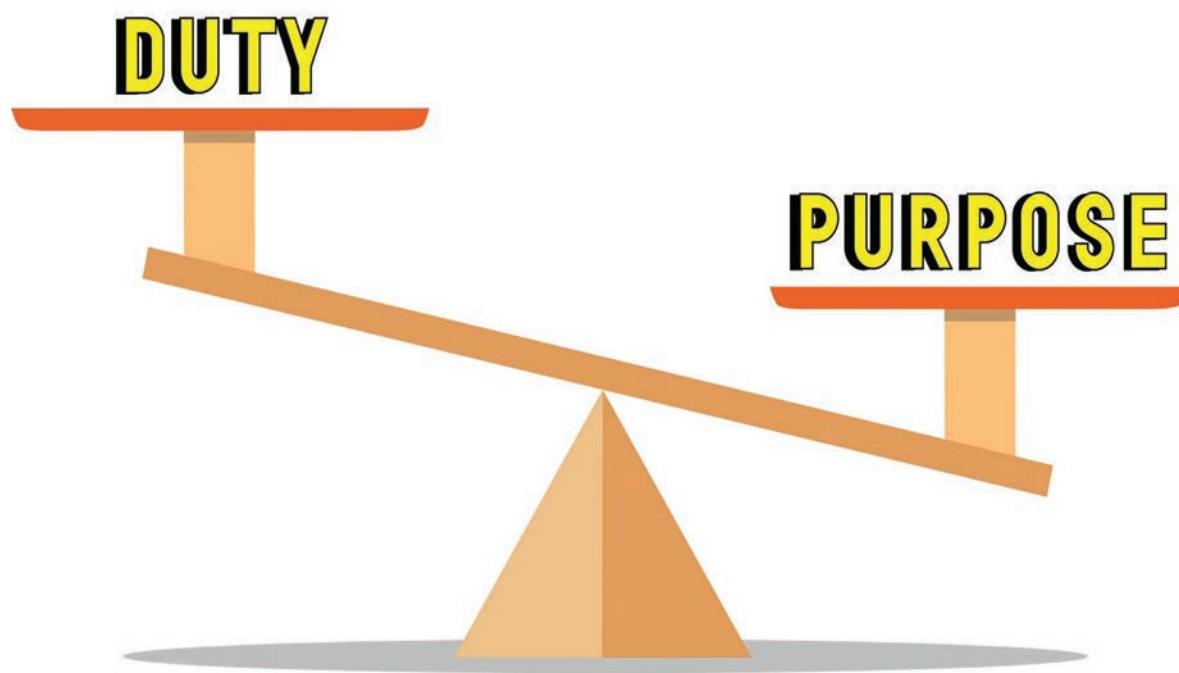
● Woke is still potent provided it's "authentic": Aurora readers know that (what I call) 'Higher Purpose Branding' has become a common challenger brand strategy in recent decades. Successful brands born with an ethical heart – Ben & Jerry's, Nike, Patagonia and The Body Shop started the trend. They will continue to be 'woke' because it is in the brands' DNA. They can do no other.

● A "back to basics" time has come: Yet Marc Pritchard's call for "back to basics" was (probably) inevitable. Many brands have set themselves up as moral leaders with their talk of 'purpose', 'values' and high-minded campaigns on a whole bunch of issues that ail humanity. Customers are hyped up as 'followers', suffused with so much 'brand love' that they 'spread the word' and create 'a movement.' Working for some companies can even feel like joining a cult (Google was when I was there). It was overheated talk that was due to be punctured by some down to earth common sense. There is another factor. The pandemic, followed by a cost of living crisis, has made survival the main concern among many people, and brands, as Pritchard says, need to pay more attention to performance and value.

● Performance and value are fundamental: It was ever thus because recessions happen on a regular basis. As Paul Feldwick said in his seminal essay, *What is a brand?*, brands begin as a promise of certainty in an uncertain world. Performance and value are not therefore merely rational promises, but

Duty Matters II

In the second part of his article on Brand Duty, Julian Saunders unveils his sustainable manifesto for difficult times.



powerfully emotional ones too. The desire for security is visceral. It is how brands began in the 19th century and it is the fundamental duty of a brand today. The early 21st century provides a different context in which to define a brand's duty today. There are two big new factors.

Firstly, service standards are defined by those apps you prod regularly on your smartphone. These titans of User Experience Design (Apple/Amazon/Google) constantly drive towards ease and fluency. Secondly, making it easy – so people don't have to think hard – is not a bland mission. In his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman explains why: Easy is a sign that things are going well: no threats, no major news, no need to redirect attention or mobilise effort. Strained indicates that a problem exists.

If you want to build brand trust you should examine all the ways your brand interacts and then make every point of contact easier. And innovate constantly to increase ease and reduce stress in the lives of your customers. (Oh, and don't forget to provide human backup for those who are not digital natives.)

● The younger generation expects more: Environmental degradation and the climate crisis are now centre stage. What younger people expect of companies now is framed by it. Ensuring that all aspects of sourcing, making, distributing, communicating and selling are sustainable is expected. For example, if your packaging is not biodegradable, then the spotlight will soon fall on you. You should keep in mind the unforgiving scrutiny of Greta Thunberg because she symbolises the duty you have to the next generation of customers.

● Differentiation is in the detail: The bedrock of successful branding is: pay attention to the detail. All of the details that matter to your consumers all of the time: pricing, product quality, performance. Constantly evolve your UXD, service and audit all your processes to meet environmental standards. You may say this sounds a bit dull and surely these are basic duties.

Generics. How will all this make my brand different and distinctive? These duties will make your brand different because they are difficult, and only well-managed brands can achieve them all. In *Simply Better*, Professor Patrick Barwise explains how this is in fact the winning strategy of the world's most successful companies: "Managers often dismiss (performance) as mere table stakes or hygiene factors or the basics. Most customers expect the basics. Alas, it seems that they are disappointed remarkably often. The rewards that would arise from businesses simply meeting and exceeding straightforward, reasonable expectations are substantial."

● The human factor: *Simply Better* is about what it means to be customer-centric and what happens if you *really* do spend time with your customers. (For starters you will stop using brain-deadening jargon like "customer-centric.")

● What brands really matter? People don't think that much about brands – but they do worry about family, friends and local communities. Practical help is what people want (not grand mission statements about brand purpose), and the brands that matter in their lives deliver on

this. This explains why the big grocery brands are so strong. My local supermarket now makes it easy for me to donate to the nearest food bank and still offers cheap food, and gives employment to local people. During the pandemic their role as a vital support system came sharply into focus – their supply chains held up and there was no rioting in the streets because the food did not run out. Shortages were sporadic and did not last long.

● Why speaking human can make you different: You notice too that people are funny, sceptical and prepared to prick pomposity. There is another underestimated way to be different: use fresh or plain language or even have a sense of humour. It's not that common. Why so? Most ads are now measured by response rates. The creative task is to optimise response – a process that tends to strip out human quirks. If you feel tempted, replace copywriters with an AI bot; the result is unlikely to produce a distinctive brand voice and personality. (We shall see, as it is early days in the AI revolution).

At the Cannes Festival this year, McDonald's scored a hit with a film called *Raise Your Arches*. It won't have you rolling in the aisles. It tells a gentle human story of office folk slipping out for a lunchtime McDonald's. And in the context of 2023 that made it very different. ■

Julian Saunders has led Account Planning departments in agencies big and small, been CEO of a WPP creative agency, worked in a Google innovation team and on behaviour change campaigns for the UK government. julians@joinedupcompany.com.

A Clarion Call For Nation Branding

Arshad Awan sets out his reasons why Pakistan needs to do this.



The current hyper-competitive reality is compelling Pakistan to seek out new methods to distinguish itself on the international stage and identify the distinctive characteristics that will set it apart. In other words, a solid 'Nation Branding' is necessary in order for Pakistan to pursue its economic objectives and create a governance tool aimed at developing positive space through social, cultural and environmental policies.

The world over, countries have strived to establish powerful 'Nation Brands' to foster and sustain their economic development and improve their standing on the global mental map of developed versus developing nations – the reality is that these two poles rarely manage to align the perception of global audiences with the reality people living in developed countries experience.

The importance of Nation Brands lies in its ability to provide a form of global brand ranking. For example, Brandirectory's *Brand Finance* recently published a report called *Brand Finance Nation Brands 2022*, in which the US was ranked first in brand value with \$26.5 trillion, followed by China with \$21.5 trillion and Germany with \$4.5 trillion.

Many countries are seriously considering a Nation Branding strategy to improve their economic standings. In the 21st century's interconnected global economy, a nation's brand image can significantly impact its economic success. In fact, 'Nation Branding' is a potent instrument to attract foreign investment, innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration, and long-term economic growth as well as boost tourism and attract talent.

Nation Branding is not a new concept and several countries have already utilised it. The US is more than a country; it is the world's most recognisable brand. Since it declared independence on July 4, 1776, brand USA has been managed and advertised globally and has marketed its culture and its products with shrewd salesmanship and ruthless determination.

India's branding strategy is a good example for Pakistan to adopt as both countries face comparable geopolitical, socio-cultural and other similar challenges, and can benefit from each other's success. India crafted a new national identity that ranged from elephants and yogis to global information technology titans. In fact, India is an incredible tale of brand success; of how a brand strategy with a vision and an incredible idea transformed one of the world's earliest cultures into a vibrant, wealthy international tourist destination. *Forbes* ranked India as the seventh most attractive country in its *50 Most Attractive Countries in the World* list. In 2021, the World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that tourism in India generated \$170 billion (5.8% of India's GDP).

India's success can be attributed to its cultural diversity, economic development, technological advances and marketing and promotion strategies, all of which have helped India establish a distinct and positive brand image globally.

Pakistan, of course, faces numerous challenges, including negative perception, limited resources, internal divisions, infrastructural challenges and competing narratives. These obstacles call for a multifaceted strategy involving government, the private sector, civil society and individuals. It requires consistent messaging, strategic marketing efforts, investments in infrastructure and proactive engagement with international partners. Pakistan can overcome its challenges and establish a solid brand image by emphasising its strengths and opportunities, addressing its flaws and communicating a positive narrative.

To do so, Pakistan must first establish a distinct brand identity that emphasises its strengths, cultural legacy and aspirations. Understanding what distinguishes Pakistan and devising a compelling message are essential for effective branding. The country needs to capitalise on its cultural heritage and the diversity of its traditions in music, art and literature, and then foster an emotive connection by showcasing these cultural assets internationally through festivals, exhibitions and cultural collaborations.

Pakistan is endowed with incredible natural landscapes, historical landmarks and

architectural marvels. Investing in tourism, enhancing the visitor experience and marketing tourist destinations more aggressively will help attract international tourists.

Pakistan's media and entertainment industries have enormous potential to influence the country's brand image. Encouraging the production of high-quality film and television content highlighting Pakistani talent, stories and cultural diversity will all contribute to a positive image. Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has substantially shaped India's brand image. Bollywood films have a massive global reach, particularly in Muslim countries, and have helped showcase India's talent, culture and landscapes.

Pakistan should cultivate an environment that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly in technology. By promoting entrepreneurship, fostering business incubators and establishing technology centres, Pakistan can position itself as an emerging innovation and technology destination.

Strategic marketing and PR campaigns can help promote awareness of Pakistan's positive characteristics, especially by engaging the global media, social influencers and key opinion leaders. Pakistan should leverage its diaspora to become brand ambassadors and participate in cultural exchanges, investment opportunities and philanthropic endeavours. Pakistan must use soft power diplomacy to

improve its brand reputation. Cultural exchanges, sports diplomacy and participation in international events such as the Olympics and film festivals will enable Pakistan to showcase its values, traditions, and accomplishments internationally.

Ensuring political stability and bolstering national security will also assist in addressing the negative perceptions that are damaging Pakistan's reputation. Engaging with international organisations, governments and businesses will contribute to developing collaborations and partnerships that enhance Pakistan's brand image. Pakistan's reputation can be bolstered through joint initiatives, and cultural and economic partnerships.

Developing an inclusive brand image that embraces and celebrates Pakistan's diverse communities, languages, and cultures is essential. Pakistan can garner international attention and demonstrate its values by emphasising inclusivity and diversity through promoting tolerance, respect, and inclusive policies.

Creating a positive brand image for Pakistan will require a concerted effort from the government, the private sector, cultural institutions, and individuals. A targeted strategy, consistent messaging, and sincere efforts can assist Pakistan to establish itself as an attractive and dynamic cultural, commercial, and tourist destination. ■

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**WE REPORT
ALL SIDES OF THE STORY**

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A Lifetime Full of Passions

Zohra Yusuf reviews *A Life Lived With Passion – Irfan Husain (1944-2020)*.

It was extremely rare for Irfan Husain's columns not to evoke a response from readers. Anger or agreement. Chuckles or censure. Envy sometimes, when he wrote about the good life – his travels and enjoyment of great food and drink. In fact, the repertoire of subjects he covered every week ensured that he was never short of readers. Irfan's political comments, of course, got the most – and strongest – feedback, from fan to hate mail.

Irfan Husain's life was truly one "lived with passion." He was passionate about people's rights (particularly those of the more vulnerable), secularism, the equality of citizens, regional peace and the lessons from history. He was equally passionate about the arts, reading, cooking and enjoying the finest cuisines. His wide interests reflected in his weekly columns should have made the editing of this collection an overwhelming task. Carmen González and Abbas Nasir, journalists themselves and friends of Irfan's, have done a remarkable job in bringing coherence and accessibility to these columns (all written for *Dawn*) on a huge range of diverse issues. As they explain in the editors' note:

"Irfan was a prolific columnist who produced some 2,000 pieces over a span of 28 years. His glorious, fascinatingly inquisitive mind contributed to making our task even more taxing, as he wrote about pretty much every topic and issue with scholarly rigour and passion."

Opting for a thematic arrangement, the editors have organised the book into seven sections according to topic and chronologically. Together they give more than a glimpse into Irfan's mind, interests and concerns. Of course, writing about this part of the world, the concerns were many, causing deep anguish. In the chapter *Faith Matters*, the columns not only show deep concern about the rise of religious extremism and the loss of tolerance but also take a historical view of the decline of Muslims in the world.

It's not only Muslim fanaticism that Irfan takes issue with. He casts a critical look at the bloodshed and violence caused by the absolute belief that one's religion or ideology is superior to another's. In his column, *The Faith Militant*, he writes: "Alas, man-made dogmas have been just as uncaring of human life as have divine faiths. More people have been killed in the name of communism and national socialism in the last century than for any other cause. But both kinds of belief generate the same kind of moral superiority and inspire similar sorts of immunity from human and spiritual laws and constraints as do revealed religions."

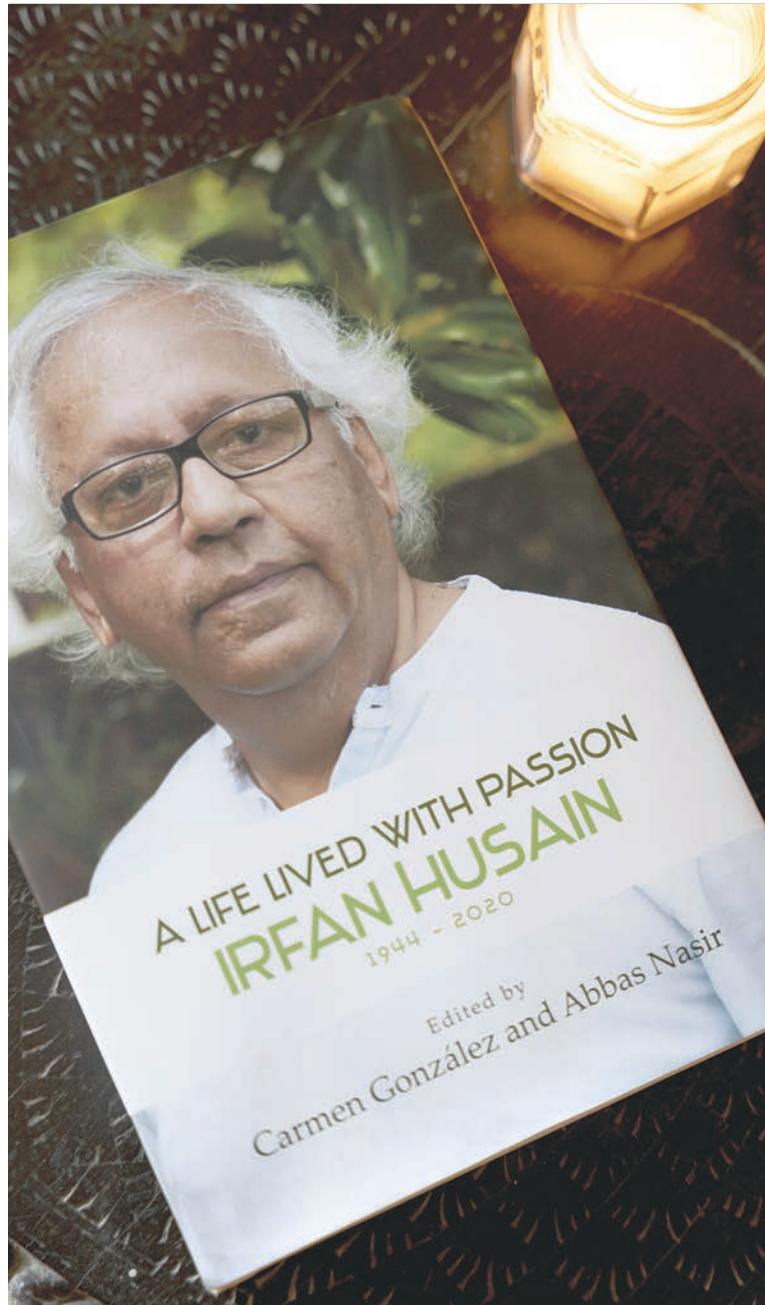


Photo: Stephan Andrew/White Star

The tolerance and understanding that Irfan attempted to promote through his writing struck a chord across the border as well. His columns were widely read in India and after his death, many Indians revealed how he engaged in dialogue with them – arguing, explaining and always responding to questions and comments. However, while he had a large circle of fans and regular readers in India and Pakistan, he received a frightening number of hate mail as well. He tried to engage with them, too, but with little success. In fact, he acknowledges that he often opened his inbox with trepidation, anticipating the barrage of hate mail from one "aggrieved" group or another.

The section *Politics of Upheaval* comprises articles that take a critical – and insightful – view of Pakistan's perpetually messy state of affairs. Irfan holds the country's "spymasters" responsible for some of the mayhem the country periodically suffers. In *How Our Spymasters View the World* (October 11, 2008), he lists major cases of intelligence failures, resulting in chaos and loss of lives. The prominent cases include the attack on the Marriott in Islamabad, and the fiasco that followed the appeasement of the Lal Masjid clerics. About the

ISI he notes: "Deeply embroiled in national politics and quixotic adventures abroad, the agency has taken its eye off the ball. The result is a conflagration set off by its own creations among the many extremist outfits it created to fight our proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir."

Irfan had a special penchant for writing about food. His description of a "humble" fried egg could be mouth-watering. Living in England, he often wrote about his family's recipes for traditional Subcontinental dishes. As a frequent dinner guest in his home in Karachi, I can vouch for both the delicious taste and the generous spread found on the family dining table. His knowledge of food, their ingredients, as well as his desire to share interesting tidbits, fascinates the reader. There is, for example, an entire column on chillies – their unusual variety interlinked with his own experience of them. A sample: "Another killer chilli is the famous *naga* (viper) or *bhut* (ghost) *jolokia* from Nagaland in India. Also grown in Dorset in the UK, the chilli is sold in some supermarkets where you have to prove you are at least 18 before you are allowed to buy it."

Being Irfan's frequent dinner companion at various eateries in Karachi, I had the pleasure

of experiencing both interesting cuisine and unique ambience. We ate at a *dhaba* frequented by port workers (where I was the only woman), at his favourite leg of lamb place, Qaiser's on Bunder Road, as well as at fine dining places where chefs and managers would hover around anxious to please, knowing he was a food critic.

Irfan's regular readers, of course, looked forward to his take on Pakistan's political scenario every Saturday. Like peeling an onion, in his column *A Fractured Society*, for example, he laid bare the rotten layers of a state and society that treated its women and minorities with violence and discrimination.

As one of Irfan's former editors, I must confess that his columns required no editing for language and length. In difficult times, they were blue-pencilled much to his chagrin. His choice of words was always precise and he took the trouble of researching his themes so it was extremely rare that a retraction was called for. He was also deeply committed to meeting deadlines and the only time a column was dropped was because of censorship or fear of official repercussions. He would then share the unpublished columns with close friends while hitting out at *Dawn's* self-imposed censorship. When his column did not appear on Saturday, December 14, 2020, I assumed it was yet another casualty of censorship. Two days later, he passed away.

Irfan candidly shared some aspects of his personal life with his readers. He wrote about his heart attack and subsequent surgery in detail. He adopted an almost detached and rational approach to sharing his experience of discovering he had cancer, and the painful treatment that followed. When his column *Cancer Comes Calling* appeared on August 6, 2020, many concerned friends called me to check up on him. It was heart-breaking for his friends to read (in an otherwise calm, informative column): "After nearly three years of this barrage (of chemotherapy), I must confess there are times I wish it would just end quietly without fuss. But then I look outside the window and see the flowers, trees and birds in our garden, and I am happy to be still alive." *A Life Lived with Passion* will be launched in London on September 27.

A Life Lived With Passion – Irfan Husain (1944-2020)
Edited by Carmen González and Abbas Nasir
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Zohra Yusuf is Chief Creative Officer, Spectrum VMLY&R.

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Styling Success

By Ibrahim Shaukat

To alleviate the fast-paced demands of life, the pressures of my business and the relentless need to be on top of all the complexities that arise from it, I try to follow a wholesome morning routine.

After an early six a.m. wake up call, I head to the gym for an hour, which enables me to prioritise my well-being through a self-care-centred approach to jump-start my day. Upon fulfilling the demands of my body, I extend my self-care approach to grounding my mind by engaging in a 20-minute meditation session, and then centring my thoughts via a five-minute session of journaling. I list three things I am thankful for, envision what will make my day great and note down the actions needed to enhance my life.

After these rigorous exercises for body and mind, I need a snack – after which my day officially begins at nine a.m. During my 15 to 20-minute drive to work, I catch up with close friends on the phone, with rap music from my car's radio inducing upbeat, positive energy in the background.

The first hour at work is dedicated to what I call 'Top Goals Time' – outlining critical tasks that demand immediate attention and often include reviewing contracts, considering potential hires and other essential matters that may arise. Thanks to the 'Top Goal' hour, the workday begins on a note of productivity and success, equipping me for the plethora of meetings that follow, be they with consultants or department heads – and strong communication is a crucial business mantra at the core of our company structure. Holding bi-weekly meetings with my leadership team allows everyone to maintain the well-being and motivational mindsets of over 40 employees.

As the CEO, the importance of my role lies in being able to optimise my teams' performances, and this is achieved by seeking their input and entrusting them with decision-making responsibilities. I strive to maintain personal connections with all my employees, using an open-door policy to bolster their engagement with the company's goals and openly discuss all concerns. I believe that the growth of my business is inherently connected to the personal growth, learning and satisfaction of the employees that constitute the business.

Just like my day, I structure my week according to a specific focus. Tuesdays and Wednesdays are reserved for internal meetings with teams like e-commerce, finance, business development and sales. Mondays and Thursdays



are dedicated to dealing with external stakeholders and Friday marks the end of the work week as we reflect on the week's progress. These meetings revolve around achieving targets, setting key performance indicators, comparing them with past achievements and addressing any setbacks.

I allocate a portion of my time to cultivating innovative thinking, expanding the boundaries of creativity and steering the business in the right direction. In the pursuit of business opportunities, we seek partnerships with brands whose objectives align with ours. Given our presence in the male grooming industry, we continually work to expand our product range, which comprises shampoos, facewashes, creams and hair-styling products. On that note, we have several negotiations in the pipeline that will potentially elevate our business to the next level. As of late, I have been focusing on our joint venture with Phillips, a demanding collaboration which entails the exclusive sale of Phillips trimmers on Daari Mooch. Ever since its inception in 2017, Daari Mooch

has consistently focused on ensuring widespread accessibility of its products and our items are conveniently available in salons, retail outlets and online.

In sustaining our communication mantra, I conduct regular meetings with our in-house creative team who is responsible for devising our advertising campaigns. Remember all the morning self-care? Well, that forms the basis of our brand. The lack of local grooming products for men in the market hindered my goal to look and therefore feel good – and this was the case for many men. Then, voilà, enter Daari Mooch. Our products also attract female buyers, interested in our gift packs for men as well as our keratin shampoos, facewashes and oils for themselves.

I attempt to carve out a one-hour lunch break during which I often engage with colleagues through board games and relaxation-centred activities – although time constraints can leave me with less than half an hour to spare for a break. I try to keep lunch 'appointments' with family and friends at least once or twice a week; they give me a much-needed escape from work-related pressures, allowing me to unwind and recharge.

Speaking of recharging, I rely on coffee to keep me going during the day. The second half

of my workday entails more meetings and a deep dive into reviewing sales figures and related matters. My goal is to wrap up work by six p.m., but let's be honest, it doesn't always happen. However, once I am off the clock, I enjoy having dinner with friends or relatives, particularly because I live alone in Lahore. Occasionally, I unwind with a swim followed by a soak in the Jacuzzi before heading home. My ideal bedtime is around 11 p.m., although every now and then I hit the sack closer to midnight.

As my family lives in Faisalabad, my life and work span both cities and sometimes the post-work routine undergoes a slight shift. When homesickness strikes, I go to Faisalabad to be with my family and work from there. The silver lining is my penchant for travel and exploration, which keeps me on the move. However, even though I am constantly on the go, I make an active effort to have some quiet time and to actually experience boredom. I find this valuable as it allows me some time for self-reflection and which is why I make an active effort to embrace it. ■

Ibrahim Shaukat is CEO,

Daari Mooch.

As told to Uzma Khateeb-Nawaz.

Campaigns for July-August 2023

CLIENT

Abbott Laboratories



Brand

Mospel

Brief

Increase sales in the mild weather

Creative Agency

In-house

Media Agency

Synchronize Carat

Creative Team

Imranuddin

Account Team

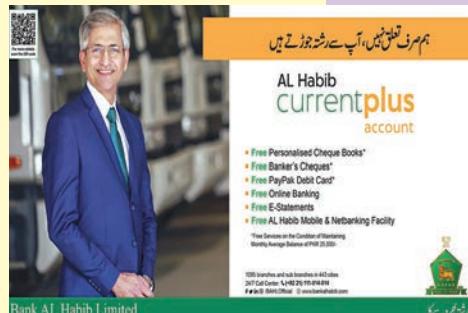
Zohaib Shaikh

Media

Radio, OOH

CLIENT

Bank AL Habib



Brand

AL Habib Current Plus

Brief

Promote the AL Habib Current Plus Account as an ideal choice for business and individual banking needs

Creative Agency

Bond Advertising

Media Agency

Bond Advertising

Digital Agency

In-house

Creative Team

Asif Hussain

Account Team

Shayan Yousuf

Media

TV, Print, Radio, Digital

CLIENT

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



Brand

Polio Eradication

Brief

Communicate the urgency of vaccinating children against polio

Creative Agency

Synergy Dentsu

Media Agency

Synchronize Carat

Digital Agency

Synite Digital

Creative Team

Syed Ferrukh

Account Team

Nazim Qureshi

Media

TV, Radio

CLIENT

Chevron Pakistan Lubricants



Brand

Delo

Brief

Promote trust and confidence among Delo fleet owners and truck drivers

Creative Agency

Spectrum VMLY&R

Media Agency

GroupM

Digital Agency

Marksman Advertising

Creative Team

Arsalan Ahmed, Asrar Alam, Ashar Ahmed, Sharf-e-Alam

Account Team

Ehtesham Khan, Khalid Nayem

Media

Print, TV, Radio, Digital, OOH

CLIENT

Colgate-Palmolive Pakistan



Brand

Palmolive Soap

Brief

Promote Palmolive Naturals soaps' 100% natural ingredients

Creative Agency

Spectrum VMLY&R

Media Agency

MediaCom

Digital Agency

Digitz-Digitas

Creative Team

Asrar Alam, Saeed Ur Rehman

Account Team

Uzma Akhtar, Hyder Ali, Hafsa Tahir

Media

TV, Digital, OOH

CLIENT

EFU Life Assurance



Brand

EFU Life

Brief

Promote EFU Life's One Stop Cover

Creative Agency

MullenLowe Rauf

Media Agency

Brainchild Communications Pakistan

Digital Agency

Symmetry Group

Creative Team

Saher Shakil, Taqi Naqvi, Rabia Abdul Qadir

Digital Team

Mahrukh Shaikh, Ibrahim Khan

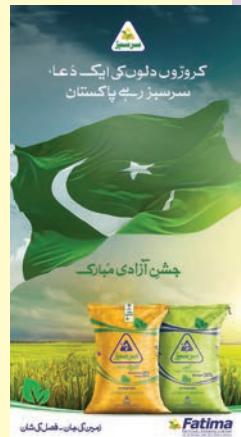
Account Team

Sadaf Zaidi, Sohaib Ahmed

Media

Print, TV, Radio, Digital, OOH

CLIENT

Fatima Fertilizer

Brand

Sarsabz Fertilizer

Brief

Highlight the vital role farmers play in our national economy especially in difficult times

Creative Agency

Soho Square Pakistan

Media Agency

Mindshare

Digital Agency

Blitz Advertising

PR Agency

Asiatic Public Relations Network (Pvt) Ltd

PR Team

Zeeshan Gul, Aiysha Abbas, Arsalan Haider, Qumber Rizvi

Account Team

Mariam Naeem Siddiqi, Mahnoor Ahmad Khan, and Semaal Atif

Media

Print, TV, Digital

CLIENT

Habib Metropolitan Bank

Brand

HMB Sirat Banking

Brief

Promote HABIBMETRO Sirat

Creative Agency

Synergy Dentsu

Media Agency

Synchronize Carat

Creative Team

Syed Ferrukh

Account Team

Shoaib Hasan, Saman Farooq

Media

TV, Print, Digital, Radio

CLIENT

Hyundai

Brand

Tucson GLS

Brief

Launch the Tusson GLS

Creative Agency

Synergy Dentsu

Media Agency

Synchronize Carat

Creative Team

Shireen Zaidi, Areeb Altaf

Account Team

Salman Haider, Zain-ul-Abedin

Media

Print

CLIENT

McDonald's

Brand

Spicy McCrispy

Brief

Promote Spicy McCrispy as the first choice in the spicy crispy burger category

Creative Agency

Manhattan Communications

Media Agency

GroupM

Digital Agency

Manhattan Communications

Creative Team

Adeeba Khan, Sharjeel Ahmed, Yasir Aslam, Shahzeb Ahmed, Ahmed Hassan

Account Team

Tehmina Siddiqui, Shahbaz Mirza, S.M. Farrukh Anjum, Frayan Doctor, Nabeel Mandviwala

Media

TV, Radio, OOH, Digital, In-Store

CLIENT

Mehran Bottlers

Brand

Pakola

Brief

Create disruption through a brand recall campaign for Pakola

Creative Agency

Orientm McCANN

Media Agency

ECHO Digital

Digital Agency

ECHO Digital

Creative Team

Rashna Abdi, Hashmat Mirza

Account Team

Mansoor Karim, Murtaza Azam

Digital Team

Sharjeel G. Baghdadi, Mehma Khan, Misha Khan, Hasnain Raza, Shamoon Arshad

Media

Social Media

CLIENT

Yango

Brand

Yango

Brief

Launch Yango Pakistan

Creative Agency

Synergy Dentsu

Media Agency

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Media

TV, Digital ■



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By Faraz Maqsood Hamidi

While I'm not crazy about watching cricket (and the season is upon us), I can't help but notice the epileptic reactions that the game injects into its fans. We swerve from extreme joy to debilitating sorrow or regret if the game doesn't go our way. And then we marinate in agonizing depression – avoiding all highlights and news coverage of the game – until the next match is scheduled. And then we get excited. And the cycle repeats itself.

Kurt Vonnegut, author of 14 novels – including *Slaughterhouse-five*, ranked among the Top 100 novels of the 20th century – had a theory about this that he delivered at a talk in New York explaining why people have such a need for drama in their life. He said, "People have been hearing fantastic stories since time began. The problem is, they think life is supposed to be like these stories."

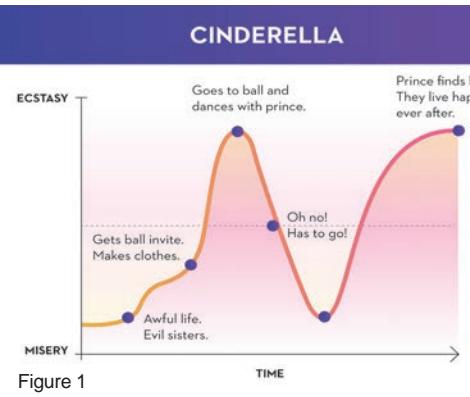


Figure 1

The Games People Play

He drew an empty grid where he showed 'Time' moving from left to right; and 'Happiness' from bottom to top. He said, "Let's look at a very common story arc. The story of Cinderella." (See Figure 1).

As you've already surmised, Cinderella's awful life reaches a climax at the ball, but then it's midnight and she makes a run for it. It's back to awful again. Then the prince finds her. And it's happily ever after. "People love that story!" This story arc has been written a thousand times in a thousand tales. And because of it, people think their lives are supposed to be like this."

Vonnegut wiped the board and said, "Now let's look at another popular story arc: the 'Disaster.'" (See Figure 2).

He shows that on an ordinary day in an ordinary town, something terrible happens to a child. Everyone rushes to save her. Old grievances that surface

seem trifling in light of this tragedy. Broken bonds are mended. Old enemies begrudgingly befriend each other for the benefit of everyone there to help. The child is saved. Hurray. Life goes back to what it was, except that

the incident has brought the community together and everything feels noticeably better than before. "People love that story! This story arc has been written a thousand times in a thousand tales. And because of it, people think their lives are supposed to be like this..."

But the problem is, Vonnegut clarifies, "Life is really like this..." (See Figure 3).

He explains that for most people, most of the time, our lives drift along with humdrum occurrences. Some ups. Some downs. But generally, nothing that the history books would want to interview you for. Nothing terribly



fantastic or fantastically terrible that'll be talked about for the next one thousand years. He says, "But because we grew up surrounded by big dramatic story arcs in books and movies, we think our lives are supposed to be filled with huge ups and downs! So people pretend there is drama where there is none."

Which explains why people invent fights. Or why we're drawn to sports. Or how we model ourselves on heroes and heroines. Or why we're always acting like everything that happens to us is such a big deal.

It isn't.

When it comes to personal care, trying not to turn our lives into a salvo might be the best salve we can apply. ■

Faraz Maqsood Hamidi is Chief Creative Officer & CEO, The D'Hamidi Partnership, a worldwide partner agency of WPI.

...OR A COMMON DISASTER STORY...

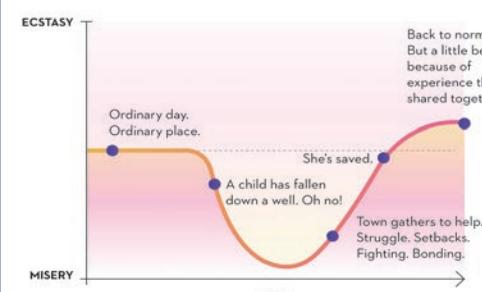


Figure 2

...WITH THAT OF REAL LIFE.

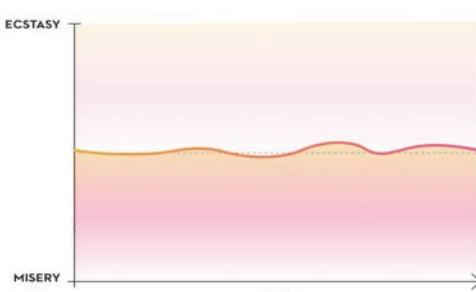


Figure 3

THE END GAME

By Aamna Haider Isani

Makeup, and bold makeup in particular, has had a curious impact on popular culture. Women seen to be wearing makeup, most significantly red lips and nails to match, have been associated with brazen confidence, sex appeal and somewhat 'vampish' traits so consistently that the movies would have you believe that innocent girls wouldn't dream of wearing red. We've seen screen idols like Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor immortalising the red lip, and even animated characters like Betty Boop (1930) and Jessica Rabbit (1988) have been iconic for their fiery pouts. 'Sex bomb' is the term loosely used for them all.

A woman's persona, it appears, is written by her makeup. The cleaner the face, the clearer the character.

Up until very recently, Pakistan's television dramas validated the stereotype with annoying precision. Imagine a heavily made up female character, ostensibly wearing three layers of mascara on her fake eyelashes and coloured contact lenses to magnify them a bit more. A thick coat of foundation reflective of war paint covers her face, which is then contoured and highlighted by strokes and strobies of various powders designed to convolute the face. The lips are often an entirely independent character: the deadlier the character, the more lined, filled, built-up and basically bold lip she'll have. This

Makeup in the 'Age of Innocence'



kind of woman you'd have seen in Pakistani dramas, and soaps in particular. In the average soap, the made-up woman was the manipulative mother-in-law, an equally toxic sister-in-law, or the quintessential 'other woman,' the home wrecker.

While it's still makeup versus no makeup when it comes to defining the innocence of a character, things are no longer as over the top as they used to be. The turn of the millennium saw the influence of Indian soaps wearing off, and we saw the rise of subtlety; that said, the principle of the character remained the same.

The heroine has evolved to have fifty shades of fresh face. Mawra Hocane as Rashtina in *Nauroz*, or Sabeena Farooq as Barbeena in *Kabuli Pulao*, are refreshingly sans makeup. Urwa Hocane has

a signature 'no makeup look' that we see in her drama serials, most recently in *Meri Shehzadi*. Urwa's eyes are made to look bigger and more bewildered with mascara and no *kajal*, liner or eye shadow. A natural-toned rouge gives her a youthful and innocent blush across the cheeks and nose. The lip tint is kept as natural as possible. You could have a Meerab (Yumna Zaidi) in *Tere Bin*, a Mehek (Dure Fishan Saleem) in *Kaisi Teri Khudgarzi*, a Zoobia (Dananeer Mobeen) in *Muhabbat Gumshuda Meri* or even an Aliya (Sajal Aly) in *Kuch Ankahi* and you'll see the pattern: good girls don't depend on makeup. They're born pretty.

Makeup, even in its subtler form, is mostly restricted to several types of female characters. First and foremost: the negative character, evil, manipulative or home breaker.

Think of the wicked step-mother in any Disney classic. Think of Nigga Jee's (Saman Ansari) Star Plus soap inspired alter ego in *Fairy Tale*. Two: the rich b*tch, and she'll inevitably have grey undertones under the makeup if they're not more obvious; Kiran Malik plays her to perfection as Natasha in *Jaisay Aap Ki Marzi*. Three: the westernised woman, meaning the one in jeans and shirts, who's thrown modesty to the wind and just doesn't care about cultural sensitivities. This character is hard to find, as every woman must subscribe to cultural sensitivities, but every now and then you'll have a Faha (Washma Fatima) as we saw in *Mujhe Pyaar Hua Tha*. Four: the ambitious woman, one who's better dressed and perhaps even fashionable as she has a life beyond the four walls of her home. Sonya Hussyn's Noor ul Ain was destined for heartbreak and solitude (*Tere Bina Mein Nahi*) the minute she chose her career over marriage. As per drama values, she obviously didn't care about family values.

We've seen these tropes play out on TV for far too long. It's time to see a good girl not afraid of a slick of Russian Roulette. Or some high contoured cheekbones and a French manicure for a successful albeit loving woman in a relationship. It's time for an extreme makeover, wouldn't you think? ■

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