

THE ME ERA

Marketing in an age when
consumers are the real brands.
And brands are the real consumers.

Meera Sharath Chandra

I found the book I was looking for.
It was inside me.

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CONTENTS

1	I am who I am	22
2	I am my relationships	26
3	I am my education	36
4	I am my profession	46
5	I am my passions	56
6	I am my finances	66

7	I am my moral compass	76
8	I am my experiences	86
9	I am my aspirations	96
10	I am my brand choices	106
11	I am my social footprint	116
12	I am in The Me Era	126

FOREWORD

by Patrick Collister

Me first

What you are about to read is a handbook of brand communication.

It comes at a significant time.

Havas have suggested that no-one would care if 81% of brands disappeared overnight.

Meanwhile, Peter Field and Les Binet, authors of “The Long and the Short of It”, have pointed out that advertising in the UK is increasingly focused on short-term results rather than on long-term brand building.

The net result is that advertising is becoming less effective.

At the same time, digital advertising has become monstrous.

There is too much of it, it is almost all of poor quality and it is indiscriminately sprayed out across the web.

Marketers have confused efficiency for effectiveness.

Today, it is reckoned that over 800 million devices have ad-blockers installed.

People don't just hate advertising, they hate anyone involved in the whole tacky business.

And yet.

Here we are, emerging from lockdown with many brands facing an existential threat.

Those that choose to invest in doing nothing more and nothing less than creating empathy with consumers will, I believe, survive.

They will also provide proof that the brand is still the single most important business idea of the last century.

You know the aphorisms as well as I do.

A product sits on a shelf. A brand is what makes you reach up to take it down.

A brand is constructed as a bird builds its nest, from the little bits and pieces we pick up over time.

A brand is what you feel about a product or a company.

Those companies that have embraced the concept of ‘brand’ have usually outperformed the markets they inhabit.

Cadbury's. Coca-Cola. Nike. Virgin.

They mean something to millions of people.

And this is the point Meera makes in her book: they mean something intimate and personal. They mean something to me.

It has become a cliché to say that branding is about building relationships. Meera, however, writes that successful brands today “address a new relationship – the one we have with ourselves.”

This is an important new perspective, I think.

Larry Page identified Google's success as an organisation in “putting the user first”.

Every new product or service was designed with the user in mind.

Not to make money.

If the engineers came up with something useful and interesting, then the money would follow.

Search. The cloud. Voice recognition. Maps.

There is a lesson here for marketers.

Put the customer first and the rest will follow.

But how?, you ask.

As I said at the beginning, this is a handbook.

Each chapter is a directive.

- Be there for people. Understand their emotional as well as their material needs. In the post-pandemic world, this is going to be especially true.
- Be useful. Teach people how to adapt and change.
- Be usable. Provide services that make things easier in difficult times.
- Be passionate.
- Be purposeful. Not everyone will share your convictions but those who do will be your most valuable ambassadors.
- Be wise to money. People's attitudes towards consumerism are being dramatically revised in the wake of coronavirus and BLM. Brands that are brash and insensitive to the changing mood will suffer.
- Be social.

As a build to Meera's advice, may I be permitted a personal build?

Be digital.

In the me era, DCO (dynamic creative optimisation) allows you to personalise your communications. And yet 97% of all digital ads do not have targeted creative for different audiences.

It used to be that you would create individual ads to reach millions of people.

Today, marketers can create millions of ads for individual consumers.

It is amazing to me that so few do.

If you think of "me" rather than of "them", you will prosper, of that I am certain.

How to read this book

Two suggestions.

One, in the course of "The Me Era", Meera lists nearly a hundred innovative marcomms ideas, from ad campaigns to installations, from apps to events and software solutions to AI-powered services.

If you can, Google each one to get the case history.

You will find inspiration in each one.

Remember, it was Picasso who said, "Good artists borrow, great artists steal."

Two, I would urge you to read the book in one sitting.

Then to consider more slowly and more thoughtfully the 'Me-isms' at the end of each chapter. Perhaps call in one or two colleagues to discuss and generate ideas around her thought-starters.

You will find them amazing trampolines for your own creativity.

Put aside an hour a week for each chapter.

After 10 weeks, you will have raised the bonnet of your brand and inspected all its working parts in detail. You will have replaced worn parts and brought others to a shine.

And that, after all, is what handbooks are for.

Patrick Collister

Founder & Editor Directory magazine & resource

(www.directnewideas.com)

Custodian of The Caples Awards

(<https://caples.org>)

FOREWORD

by PJ Pereira

I've crossed paths with Meera a few times on the international awards judging circuit, always leaving with the greatest impression. Being in one of these juries requires you to be able to debate the international patterns of taste with the same comfort you defend and educate others on the nuances of local cultures. Because of her experience in the UK and India, Meera represents that reality like few do. Which means she has an important perspective for anyone interested in understanding both the universalities and particularities of our industry, regardless of where we or the work come from.

That's why I was so excited about putting my hands on her book. Being Brazilian myself and working in the global market from the US, her impressions have always been very insightful for me. She has always been a person I liked to listen to, before forming strong opinions when we judged an award show together, or when I was thinking about the big challenges the world of marketing has to face.

But "The Me Era", besides revealing the prophetic quality of her own name, also surprised me with one of those rare ideas that get you thinking or, better, provoke new ways of thinking. The idea that in the social media world everyone is a brand is an essential notion for anyone understanding our time. But Meera goes beyond and states that if people should take care of their personal brands, brands should carefully manage their personas too.

Learning from individuals may be the wisest recommendation one can make to a brand when the world requires companies and labels to be authentic and transparent in their beliefs. And the way she breaks it down through the pages of this tome is the perfect balance of telling and teasing that may allow you to get your own thinking to a new age.

Combined with the no bullshit, straight to the point language and the careful selection of featured work, the thoughts displayed in "The Me Era" are a great read for any marketing nerd, anywhere in the world.

Hopefully, you will enjoy it as much as I did.

PJ Pereira

Creative Chairman and Co-Founder

At Pereira O'Dell

Former President of multiple juries at Cannes Lions, One Show, Art Directors Club, Dubai Lynx, Eurobest, London International Awards, D&AD among others.



I am a communications professional with over three and a half decades of global experience. An award-winner, keynote speaker and jury member at all leading international festivals – Cannes Lions, Clio, Art Directors Club, One Show, New York Fest, D&AD, Caples – I have worked in large international

agency networks across continents and have been on their global task forces. Having led both the creative function and the overall business – as ECD and MD – I have always stood for cutting edge creativity with demonstrable accountability. Now as entrepreneur and founder of Tigress Tigress – a digital-led integrated communications agency – I find my sweet spot in using behavioural economics, category niche opportunities, multicultural marketing and purpose branding, to create startling differentiations and super-charged consumer-brand connects all over the world.

I didn't set out to name the book after me.

Neither was it an afterthought.

I believe it is just happy synchronicity.

It is, after all, the story of the individual, the consumer.

A consumer whose every thought and action, every choice and affiliation, every love and hate says, "I am me". A consumer who is realising that he or she is unique and differentiated. A universe of one. A brand.

If the last decade was all about the power of the community, I believe the future is about rediscovering the 'me' within that groundswell. Yes, all over again.

Because time, technology and market forces have not stood still. And consumers can feel the sand slipping beneath their feet as wave after wave of change lashes upon their world.

It is fast becoming obvious that while we truly enjoy being part of like-minded groups and tribes, we do want to be known for who we intrinsically are.

Not lost among a sweeping swathe of humanity. Not painted over with a broad brushstroke of strategy. Not randomly targeted by an indiscriminate spray of marketing bullets.

Only personal branding can set us apart from the teeming billions.

Equally, though, it is about the living, breathing brand.

A brand that is turning into discerning consumer. By investing in and buying into the delight, loyalty, advocacy and repeat engagement of its new-found franchise-of-one.

If the past few years have been all about consumers co-creating and co-parenting brands, marketers now realise that they must return the favour.

By helping consumers shape their personalities, showcase their talents and achieve their goals. And by defining where they fit into our lives, how they can enhance our potential, what they can add to our purpose.

The marketing handbook is getting rewritten. Because goalposts have shifted. Thumb rules are out of sync with the new paradigm. And unlearning and relearning are the two shortest routes to tomorrow.

Today's marketplace is an equal-opportunity playing field for nifty start-ups and diversified conglomerates, for garage ideas and global consortiums. And business success doesn't lie in expansive plans but in granular understanding.

It's all about two things: resonance and relevance.

Products and people now share an intertwined future. As two symbiotic entities that recognise and respect each other.

If we have imbued brands with human values like DNA, personality, image, traits and purpose, it is time for marketers to create sharply-defined differentiators, well-honed propositions, unique codes and vision statements for us.

Time to flip things around.

I have always believed that there is a book inside each of us. One that no one else can write. Because it is drawn from all things that make up an individual and rooted in a set of distinctly personal assets. Firm beliefs, deep passions, amazing talents, bold opinions and strong purpose. It is expertise and experience bound together in numbered pages, with every chapter a hat tip to its author.

This one's mine.

Who am I? My brand name may have been the work of my parents (and good job, folks, you just wrote me a book title). But my brand value? All mine. Built over years. Across experiences. Within certain social frameworks. Born of certain powerful bonds. Contoured by knowledge. Coloured by emotions. Impacted by events. Scarred by situations. Shaped by influences. Spurred by success. Hardened by failures. Softened by sensitivities. Pushed by circumstance. Propelled by talent. Stymied by diffidence. Buoyed by big dreams. Cut-to-size by reality. The sum total of a life lived by just one person in the whole wide world.

A few other things set me apart: how I look, what I like to wear, what brands I believe in, where I travel, who I meet, my relationships, my health, my state of mind, my lifestyle and attitudes, my commitments and responsibilities, my passions and purpose.

And then being part of the fabric of society, I look for some forms of validation and solidarity – people I vibe with, a shared wavelength, a sense of belonging. I may find them in sport, music, favourite authors, movie genres, social media patterns, in beliefs and aspirations, brands I love, brands I hate.

All this adds up to a heady singularity. And I do believe it must be acknowledged, encouraged, celebrated.

For many of us – floating on our backs in pools of affinity, being friended and liked and retweeted, having chatty conversations with robots and machines – the penny is dropping. We are at that time. We are at that place. We are bang in the middle of The Me Era.

For marketers and those in the business of communication, this is both the challenge and the opportunity. Because this is the new reality. It's even beyond mass customisation and hyperpersonalisation.

It's a complete role reversal.

1

I am
who
I am

Never has a single letter of the alphabet come to mean so much. The word 'I' is a many-splendoured one. It births all things intrinsic and innate. It embeds itself in community and tribe. And then it begins to explore individuality and identity.

As a rare medley of education, experience, expertise, emotion and evolution, none of us can be thrown into a comfortable box of demographic and psychographic parameters for marketers. In fact, such clusters are losing their sheen because there is no personal truth to be mined from the morass of collective data.

This is why we click out of emails that start with our name and then proceed to talk generics. This is why social media became such a raging success – it let us be seen and heard as individuals. This is why we now look to brands to go beyond the base level of quality and functionality – to etch our identities, speak to our beliefs, underscore our differentiators, share our mission.

I have taken the liberty of peppering the narrative with shout-outs to brand communication that I have found highly compelling. These are examples that have stood out for me either as award entries that I have judged or as case studies I have discovered in my annual advertising pilgrimage to Cannes Lions over the last 15 years.

I have hand-picked those that have used the personal potpourri as their springboard. Brands that have finessed their engagement to perfection and dialled-up their pro-activeness to a whole new level. There are some classics too – campaigns we can now see with fresh eyes to marvel at their foresight and vision.

We are just opening the floodgates of communication possibilities. And the changing dynamics are calling for changing reference points.

How will this pan out in the power-play between:

Consumer and brand?

Medium and message?

Expectation and experience?

Result and responsibility?

2

I am
my
relationships

When a personal brand is being shaped, perhaps the first and innermost layer of influences comes from close and familiar relationships. This impacts us in more ways than we care to admit.

Today, these influences have become a power bank of stimuli for resourceful marketers.

Pharma companies talk to us, using genetic markers to initiate a dialogue. They also tap into life stages and the emotional first principles surrounding each of them.

Baby care brands are pitched at new moms and dads, using a beautiful personal milestone as the start point for a conversation and then growing along, across the experience curve, with the family.

Special occasions like Christmas and weddings spark off iconic ad campaigns, using bonding as a powerful glue. In fact, special days are evolving around relationships with mother, father, sibling, friend,

passion, community and planet – a homage to the gravitational pull of connections forged at a deeper level.

There's a reason why we use phrases like 'Hallmark Moment' without thinking twice. Because when communication is based on emotion that runs so deep, each of us sees our closest and dearest people reflected in it, captured as indelible cameos in our minds.

Which is why the same popular vacation spots suddenly hold a different meaning for us – coloured as they are, by our own magical once-in-a-lifetime memories. Which is also why some songs resonate with us in a totally inexplicable way – because they are emblematic of a time or a place or an event in our lives.

The list of advertising messages that recognise us for who we are increases with every passing day. Because of a simple truth and a blinding realisation. A visceral individual experience is always going to be at the epicentre.

Dove's *Self Esteem* and *Real Beauty* communication celebrate the right to be not-so-perfect, to be you. From *Evolution* and *Onslaught* to *Real Beauty Sketches* and now the *Show Us* campaign, the brand consistently calls out body image and social comparison issues and reframes what we want to see in the mirror.

Nike does this ever so well too – *What Are Little Girls Made Of*, *Dream Crazy*, *What Will They Say About You*, *Equality Has No Boundaries* – just a few insightful messages that turn us into self-starters with a vision. In recent days, *We Are Never Too Far Down To Come Back* spurs us to battle our way through the tough times we are facing.

And as State Street's *Fearless Girl* stares down the Wall Street bull, we too stare down perceptions and stereotypes.

A refreshing take on the deep understanding between friends was Budweiser's *Wassup* that heroed 'watching a game and having a Bud' with just one word that united mates in complete bonding. Amazing that this 'at home, on the couch' moment, that was a good 7 years ahead of Covid-19, now makes utter sense.

Increasingly, brands have identified and addressed a new relationship – the one we have with ourselves. The DeBeers *Right Hand* campaign comes to mind. The communication made a diamond a self-purchase – no more waiting for someone to put a ring on your finger.

And born of equal relationships is a brand's ability to laugh at itself, be human, be honest. This has created a whole new genre of endearing and memorable mea culpa advertising like KFC's *FCK* ad for its chicken shortage that elicited both social sharing and ready forgiveness.

It also makes for confident brands that thumb their noses at competitors – Burger King's *Burn That Ad* and *Whopper Detour* took on McDonald's in daring ways and sent engagement and sales through the roof. The old PC v Mac campaign still draws a chuckle and the cola wars will always be legendary.

We have reached that stage of consumer-brand comfort where we now talk openly about subjects – from menstrual cycles to mental health, from sexual orientation to abuse. We raise our voices against issues and concerns, flagging off biases and inequalities. And we have started engaging with our planet knowing that we alone are responsible for eroding the goodwill of that equation.

Relationships are the stuff human values are made of. They are often the stuff emotional baggage is made of. Successful messaging understands this, respects this.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Global events and pandemics force us to re-examine our relationships and realise how invaluable some of them are. But adversity also creates friends out of complete strangers – those who have been through challenges together are bonded forever through an unforgettable happenstance.

2

Social media helps brands exploit the six degrees of separation. A friend of a friend is the beginning of a powerful customer chain. It is the stuff of LinkedIn introductions, a thread or tag, a follower base, a referral. In theory, anyone anywhere in the world could become a customer in less than six steps.

3

Technology is hailed as the great enabler of relationships. But, potentially, technology itself could be a relationship for those who live more in the virtual world. Gamers, AR/VR enthusiasts, app users, forum visitors. Today, we confide in, rely on and share all moments 24/7 with our gadgets. A very special bond we can't live without.

3

I am
my
education

The shaping of our intellects, the honing of our minds and the moulding of our morality – all begin with the schooling we have been through. In addition to the curriculum, we get life lessons that are invaluable.

Our teachers, our fellow students, our alma mater – all have a role in the decisions we take and the choices we make.

And then again, there is the pride of excelling, the badge value of institutions, the ability to land placements.

From playschool to PhD, you are the result of an academic order that builds your value system.

Your progress – year after year, class after class – will nudge you towards your favourite discipline, your strong suit in which you will become

proficient in time to come. This will inform your career path and your future professional success.

Add to this the camaraderie of the wonder years, the enduring friendships, the passion clubs and unforgettable escapades – and your distinctive character begins to emerge.

One of the classic examples of the 'me factor' can be seen in a typical alumni group. Given the same educational ladder, how have you and your batchmates evolved so differently as techies, doctors, lawyers, artists, poets, teachers, wanderers, founders?

Education finds its expression in so many diverse and interesting ways. It is also, increasingly, a method by which brands engender affinity with their customers.

Education makes for highly valuable online content. The beauty of your knowledge is that it is immensely shareable once acquired. And the online space is ideal meeting ground for learning. The *CNA Speaking Exchange* initiative is a delightful case study, where young foreign students learn English from senior citizens in retirement homes in a win-win interaction.

Information can be made highly interactive. Brands are using immersive storytelling to tell us more about the category as a whole and their functionalities in particular. They crowdsource and co-opt customers and reward their creativity. Microsoft's *The Fanchise Model* campaign makes customers a part of the story and gives them a piece of the action. Teaching them Xbox intricacies while picking their brains in return.

Knowledge should be a universal right. The Philippine mobile brand Smart created a profound impact by turning used SIM cards into *TXTBKS* – textbooks for children that levelled the playing field for education across the country. Again, the Project Literacy campaign called *The Alphabet of Illiteracy* is a refresher course for us on social ills and a compelling case for essential education.

Righting wrongs and altering mindsets are best done through impactful lessons that feel like engaging content. *Dumb Ways to Die*, the Metro Trains initiative in Australia, is demonstrative of this. As is the stop-in-your-tracks *Near Miss Memorials* campaign by Kiwirail.

It takes a tough masterclass on discrimination to challenge attitude and change behaviour. P&G brand Ariel moved the needle on gender equality with *Share The Load*. By challenging the automatic assumption that laundry is a woman's job, it urged men to step up and do the right thing – prompting action through his-n-hers nudges on packs and wash care labels.

Brands have used vivid demonstration as a tool to highlight product benefits. Volvo's *Live Test Series* is a fascinating see-it-believe-it example. The *Epic Split* film, in particular, with Jean-Claude Van Damme doing a gymnastic split between two trucks, went viral – creating instant recall for the dynamic steering feature.

Learning builds and defines one's distinctiveness. Iconic brands like Nike, Harley Davidson and Apple feed that by clearly delineating their audience archetype – preferring to champion individualism over a more popular appeal. Cult brands are now looking for cult consumers.

Education gives us benchmarks to live by. When applied to products or services, this helps us calibrate offerings in a category, judge our resonance with a brand and decide on advocacy, indifference or enmity. Thoughtful brands are those that empower us with knowledge and keep us one step ahead of the now.

There is no shortage of information on the worldwide web. But from a well-educated mind comes a more refined search and a better ability to turn content into knowledge. This is the hallmark of an empowered customer.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Learning never ends and therein lies the opportunity. If brands can be a source of constant knowledge, if they can be the trusted mentors in their category, if they can be the thought leaders in their domain, they will become the go-to resource for customers. An investment in constant customer education is an investment in the brand.

2

Technology is perhaps the fastest to change – and that makes it the greatest leveller. It's easy to play catch-up by skipping a few versions and hopping onto the latest trend. As it evolves, technology simplifies usage, becomes more universal – brands could be at the cusp, helping grassroots audiences change the quality of their lives.

3

The power and impact of edutainment have never been higher. While remote learning classes and online courses are increasing in numbers, absorption of knowledge via interactive and lean-forward mechanisms is the most effective way forward. The secret lies in making rich, experiential content intrinsic to the curriculum.

4

I am
my
profession

Among the more momentous decisions in today's world is the career we choose for ourselves. And whether we display hunger, smarts, moxie or gravitas, we will be bringing our special brand of expertise to the professional world.

Marketers see this not just as a focal point but also as an opportunity to tap into the wallet of first jobbers – just as they are discovering a new-found financial independence.

Banks talk of lifestage marketing and see this as the first creditworthy moment. Starting with the card, they deepen the relationship throughout the earning and retirement years, with a whole suite of banking, investment and insurance products.

It is at this juncture that a slew of brands find eager buyers – formal wear, accessories, gadgets and tech enhancements, grooming products and travel gear.

Also, this is the most prolific season for apps that enhance one's productivity and increase one's smarts. Apps for work are a must – as are related ones that help find an apartment, navigate a new city or socialise and network.

At every step of the success ladder, there are increased needs, both for efficiency as well as impact. These are defining times – where we put our stamp on the official environment and mark our turf.

Specialisation and skill come to the fore and in a highly competitive world, every professional is only looking north. There are goals and self-improvement benchmarks being set and there are clear time frames and trajectories being charted out.

And professions too have come a long way from the conventional. There are a host of growth opportunities, inconceivable in decades gone by – and brands have cashed in on the exciting avenues opening up.

Want a job with a difference? The campaign by Tourism Queensland offering the *Best Job In The World* – as caretaker of Hamilton Island – helped publicise the location as a travel destination.

And should you want to go the entrepreneurial route, Johnnie Walker's *Man Who Walked Around The World* should be just the inspiration.

Not doing the job you were tasked to do? There's a campaign for that too. *Climate Name Change* renamed hurricanes after political figures who don't deliver on commitments.

Working against all odds to carve a niche for yourself? The Rio Olympics' *We're The Superhumans* shows you just how it's done.

Under Armour's Michael Phelps ad captures the hard work behind the success. And their subsequent *I Will What I Want* message heroes purpose and determination.

Perhaps the most endearing of them all is the recognition of a profession taken for granted. *Thank You Mom* by P&G celebrated the silent triumph of mothers by showcasing moms of Olympic champions and lauding their unstinting support.

On a lighter note, the need to be the best in the business has been flipped on its head in the KFC *Michelin Impossible* campaign, where the brand story revolves around the impossible task of winning a Michelin Star for fast food.

The corporate world has turned brand names into everyday vocabulary – and that is the power of messaging and marketing. We Xerox, we Fedex, we WhatsApp, we Google, we Post-it, we Uber it, we Airbnb it, we Zomato or Swiggy or Doordash it.

The road to the corner room comes with its own highs and lows, stresses and successes, changes and challenges. Smart brands showcase the winner gene and play to the mindset of dreamers and achievers.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

The rise of a rash of start-ups has led to many young dreams turning into funded companies. However, the unreal speed and trajectory of growth lead to a host of issues that question viability, leadership and capacity to scale. Brands that hand-hold in an affirmative way find customers who are willing to spend to succeed.

2

Solopreneurs are the new face and force of enterprise. But it's not just lonely at the top, it's lonely all around. Being the encouragement and energy, the sounding board and outsourced knowledge bank, turns a brand into a friend and mentor who understands the emerging breed and provides all the accessories for achievement.

3

Redundancies and lay-offs are the new normal. Trying times have created a new set of professionals ready for the second innings of their careers. Between jobs and looking for avenues, they are open to information, advice and support. They leave no blog unread and here's where branded content has an impactful role to play.

5

I am
my
passions

True self-expression often comes packaged as passions – things we feel so strongly about that we lose ourselves in the pursuit.

Sport is, perhaps, one of the most powerful and popular forms. And even if you don't actively play, you are as energetic in your support of the game, your team, your heroes.

With the increased franchise of gyms, popularity of yoga, success of marathons and hundreds of self-help apps for fitness, it is evident that staying mentally and physically agile is a highly popular interest.

Entertainment is another area where we begin to explore our tastes. Romance, crime, action, historical or documentary – we find ourselves gravitating towards a certain style of narrative. With the arrival of OTT players, there's scope for you to explore content that's based on your specific viewership thumbprint.

Music is both a social glue and differentiator. We appreciate those who vibe with the same music that we play and love. But we also profile ourselves as listeners in our own right. The bands we resonate with, the artistes we have on our playlists, the singles we can hear multiple times – these underscore who we are.

Increasingly, with reality shows, we see several other passions come to the fore – cooking, dancing, quizzing, fashion and comedy. These are huge opportunities for brands to ride the crest of engagement.

Passions are what we go the extra mile for and brands can chance upon amazing insights here. Soccer moms can tell us why they do the early morning shift. Young ballerinas can show us how practice makes perfect. And the personal story of a Michelin Star chef can be the inspiration for a million home cooks.

For a brand, there's so much to be gained from this consumer energy. Because it is what people buy into as a culture, a cause, a celebration.

The BT Sport *Unscripted* campaign, for instance, used AI to predict totally unexpected results. This was done to get maximum eyeballs by intentionally making fans hopping mad about the forecasted outcomes.

The famous *Sound of Honda* innovation brought back Ayrton Senna's fastest lap in Suzuka 1989 – a lap of nostalgia, a tyre-and-tarmac tribute that recreated the exact engine sounds to celebrate F1 at its finest.

Pharrell William's turned his song into an experience and made the world a more cheerful place with *24 Hours of Happy*. By allowing people to add their happiness moment to the song, he made the emotion highly shareable.

Sometimes, a personal crusade becomes an all-consuming passion. Madonna Badger started *#WomenNotObjects* to encourage the ad industry to connect and empathise with women, without objectifying them in their work.

The Netflix campaign for *Narcos* rode the popularity wave and turned the ads into *Spanish Lessons*. By making the lead characters teach Spanish terms in true *Narcos* style, they stormed social media and swept viewership.

Passion runs high in the automotive sector too – the relationship with your vehicle, after all, is one that lasts over miles and years. The Volkswagen Kombi *Last Wishes* campaign sees a car make a will before being discontinued as a model. The car bequeaths its parts to those who have cherished it and made it a part of their memories.

Love for one's pet is another strong and compelling emotion. Based on this insight, Mars Petcare teamed up with Exxon Mobil in the campaign *#Mutts4Trucks* to help truckers overcome solitude, feel safer and stay healthy, through an amazing bond with their dogs.

Superbowl is the greatest of advertising playgrounds – and while brands jostle for attention, what hit the top spot was a genius fake ad case study by Newcastle Brown Ale for an epic commercial they didn't make! *If We Made It* spun a story from the fact that they had no budgets and no rights to air their spot. It turned out to be just the clutter-buster the fans cheered for.

Often, responding to a star-endorsed ad is not just a fan moment – it's a ratification of our true desires and our inner drive. This is one of the reasons why celebrities really work for brands. They are reminders and repositories of our passion – who, in truth, are celebrating us.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Passions release endorphins. This helps us channelise our positive energies. Externally, it translates into being generous with advocacy, more bullish about life, more open in our responses. Internally, it translates into a strong sense of self-worth, fulfilment, self-confidence. Brands could plug into emotions in both sets of traits.

2

The pursuit of a passion adds a whole new dimension to our lives – it is the third space after home and office. It is the one place where we can be ourselves, lose ourselves, find ourselves. This gives us the balance that is so essential in our routines. And when a brand joins us in finding that equilibrium, it seamlessly becomes a part of our day.

3

Similarly, companies that are passionate about the business they are in, notice that their audiences attribute commitment, sincerity and hard work to their brands. This deep resonance or emotional contagion draws them closer to their consumers. Brand love is built on a shared attitude of giving it everything and going the distance.

6

I am
my
finances

Let's face it – money makes the world go round. Besides being the means for sustenance, it has become the surrogate for a host of social measurements. Power, prestige, status, lineage, education, property, respect are all metrics that money hopes to buy.

From our early years, when we learn to live within our pocket money and save in our piggy banks, we grow into people with purchasing power, sought after for our disposable incomes.

This leads to the need for wealth management, investment planning, risk assessment and insurance – all of which make us preferred clients of banks and financial institutions.

Financial independence is one of the biggest freedoms. Self-sufficiency is a major contributor to self-worth. Probably why being employed or being an entrepreneur helps us announce our true selves. And why remuneration remains one of the key parameters of professional achievement. We begin to shape our self-concept on what money means to us – as we earn it, spend it, save it.

Brands nuance their narratives, pricing, packaging SKUs, ingredients and offers based on precision data that can easily be derived from our monetary habits and patterns. They know that money can stir up a raft of latent emotions – insecurity, envy, happiness, concern, hope – and they tap into these wellsprings.

Consumers may have found ways to loosen the purse strings and indulge in some luxuries, flexing their credit ratings to advantage, riding economic downturns with sheer practicality as they make ends meet.

Equally, when it comes to making today's buyers spend or save, take judicious or impulsive decisions, remain loyal to the old or flirt with the new, brands have done their math.

Our preoccupation with money is rich currency for brands. Many have seen the wisdom of forming emotional equations instead of mathematical ones.

Thai Life Insurance, many years ago, tugged at our heartstrings with the film *Unsung Hero*, celebrating the simple joys of helping others as true wealth.

Santander Bank's *Beyond Money* campaign targeted a sceptical younger generation by asking them to buy or sell their real-life experiences – making the barter a barometer of true worth and value.

Value for money was perhaps defined best through the delightful idea by the comedy theatre Teatreneu. To combat the increase in government taxes on tickets that led to a decrease in audiences, facial recognition systems were fitted on seats to calculate the number of times you smiled. You only needed to *Pay Per Laugh!*

Riding on the insight that we all now use our cards without a second thought, Misereor came up with *The Social Swipe*, the first ever secure-software poster that verified and accepted credit cards – enabling easy donations for daily essentials or basic rights.

Never let it be said that the finance sector can't use humour to make a telling point. The YouTube pre-roll ad *Unskippable* by car insurance company Geico is perhaps among the most widely shared laughs in recent times.

Nothing is more symbolic of the way we'd all love to luck out than a lottery. And yet, nothing is more emotive than the story of Spanish

Lottery's adorable character *Justino* who wasn't expecting such a magical Christmas.

FMCG brands have often used financial hooks as advertising triggers. *Snickers Insurance* now covers those who demonstrate crazy behaviour when they are hungry and rewards them with more of the appetite-appeasing product.

Taglines from banking institutions demonstrate their powerful ethos. *The Citi Never Sleeps*. HSBC *The World's Local Bank*. *There Are Some Things That Money Can't Buy*. *For Everything Else There's MasterCard*. And of course, the lottery world thrives on the theme that *All It Takes Is A Dollar And A Dream*.

Financial products are challenging to upsell in the best of times. Economic fluctuations and downturns don't help. But, as humans, we gravitate towards those who spend time getting to understand us – and we put our money where our trust is.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Our experiences shape our financial judgement – they make us risk-ready or risk-averse. Life planning is shaped by lessons learnt and altering that mindset is often an uphill task. It is here that communication stimuli need to be experimented with – to provide just the right triggers to overcome steep barriers, induce first trial.

2

Money, without doubt, is a major stress factor. Strangely it is also a wonderful stress release. Retail therapy is something all brands offer with readiness as a balm for all worries. But when a brand demonstrates that it truly understands how tough it is for us to run a tight ship on a budget, it enjoys both our attention and appreciation.

3

Perhaps the most recycled bit of plastic is the credit card – used and reused on a daily basis. The opening up of other transaction mechanisms like e-wallets adds to ease of purchase. Ecommerce brands that make the cart-to-payment process quick and painless earn an extra window of time to cross-sell and upsell other products.

7 I am my moral compass

Brands are increasingly expected to go beyond product or service offering to purpose and mission. Today, consumers find affinity with brands that fight their fight, espouse their cause, resonate with their ideology.

Our belief systems operate at deep levels – and they underpin our everyday reactions in very strong ways. This holds true for our biases as well – often unconscious, they surface out of the blue and impact our responses.

Often, the vision we have for a better world stems from life experiences we have encountered. Profiling affects all of us – whether it is racism, sexism, ableism, ageism or classism, whether it is shaming or bullying, whether it is just because we don't fit into a box. And this informs the way we think and act.

But more importantly, it gives us an opportunity to raise our voices for what we believe in and to change the status quo.

When we find a brand that is in sync with our views and points to the same true north, it rationalises our choice and reaffirms our trust.

With the thrust on preserving our planet, sustainability and eco-friendliness are now two key drivers for purchase. And with the emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion are becoming the new criteria companies must meet.

Add to this the various ills of society, the many injustices that still need resolving and human rights that must be restored – and we realise that we too, much like governments, corporations and brands, have greater responsibilities in this world.

Brands have beliefs embedded in their souls too. These outline what they will and will not do. These speak to their efforts towards the greater good.

Benetton declared their strong stance years ago, accompanied by bold and often controversial imagery. From *United Colours of Benetton* to the *Unhate* campaign, they called out bias and stood for change.

The defiant words of the *We Rise* film by righttoplay.com script the future of girl power and admire the attitude of a gender that refuses to be subjugated.

Who can forget *The Marathon Walker* – the woman carrying a pot on her head right through the Paris marathon – fighting to bring borewells to her village, in a disruptive intervention for Water For Africa?

The shocking reality of harmful plastic was showcased as an imaginary place *Trash Isles*, complete with its own passport, citizens and constitution. A vivid demonstration of the country-size dilemma of waste and the need for urgent action.

The Sydney Children's Hospital Foundation found a common ailment among kids – homesickness. The campaign *Curing Homesickness – Mum's Sause* enabled donating in an effortless and engaging way. As kids said they really missed mum's pasta sauce, they bottled it and sold it in order to garner funds.

The Lebanese newspaper An Nahar sparked off a massive movement with *The New National Anthem Edition* to include women in the lyrics.

This burgeoned into a full-blown social rising for equality and led to reform and change.

Diversity Is Strength says the AIG Pride Jersey campaign. The United Black jersey was made up of LGBTQ Pride colours in a show of solidarity. Very recently, Skittles did quite the opposite but for the same reason, going colourless and giving up its rainbow for its Pride partnership with GLAAD.

Ikea's Design Vision created the *Thisables Project*, with thoughtful hacks to help the physically challenged navigate household furniture and feel right at home.

**A cause recognised is a solution found.
Brands that find their moral centre also
find creative ways to fulfil unspoken
needs. Because the most effective route
to responsible business is through the
corporate conscience.**

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Conscious consumerism is a brand in itself – this makes a marketer’s job harder. When we are willing to pay more for products that do good, when we look beyond the logo to the purpose, the brand narrative becomes frightfully important. And it is not just the product, it is also the ethical process that goes into the making of it.

2

Today, multicultural marketing needs to tackle more than diversity and ethnicity. And the reason is that intersectionality has become a huge factor. When we are victims of two or more kinds of biases simultaneously at play, we are caught in the crosshairs of an unfair world. Products need to be more thoughtful, messaging more sensitive.

3

Let’s talk about the new avatar of luxury – positive, planet-friendly and pricey for a reason. Philanthropic luxury retail has come of age – and affluent millennials are willing to pay top dollar for brands that outline their sustainability mantra for our world. A virtuous cycle where strong demand motivates upscale brands to keep giving back.

8

I am
my
experiences

We are creatures of circumstance. We have been shaped by events, places, times and interactions that have changed us forever. These have often challenged our self-concept and skewed our objectivity.

But we are who we are – and our world view is what it is. Brands must be sensitive enough to realise that our reactions come from experiences unique to us.

Powerful emotions attach themselves to these life events. We can seldom separate them. When a brand taps into those feelings, it also taps into the residual impact of the episodes we have been through. Which is why brands face steep barriers to trial or behavioural change.

Experiences translate into indelible memories and nostalgia on the one hand, learning curve and wisdom on the other. What distinguishes us is the way we embrace both and move ahead.

Big data can see the finer details that go into individual decision-making. But often, amazing insights into consumer psyche are lost by the wayside simply because they don't fall into the bucket of the largest customer set.

AI is learning to respond one-on-one to specific needs, to recognise us – by face, by voice, by persona. Soon, maybe, it can empathise and emote with us as well, sharing our happiness and heartaches.

Every day we discover something new. This may change our attitude to life, improve the quality of our day or shake us out of our apathy. And many brands wait with bated breath for that zeitgeist moment.

Marketers are convinced that creating experiences is the way forward. But it needs to go beyond the buzzword and it needs to ring true to both consumer and brand.

Skype's *Stay Together*, a poignant campaign, recreated moments of bonding even though the family was spread across miles – perfectly marrying Skype technology with the need for togetherness.

The *Child Replacement Programme* for dog adoption matches dogs to empty nesters who want to fill a void in their lives. This was Pedigree's way of enabling some much-needed unconditional pet love.

Momondo curated a vacation itinerary for travellers by discovering their genetic roots – the *DNA Journey* created new tourist spots even as it tapped into our inherent curiosity about our ancestry.

Decades ago Kodak created the lump-in-the-throat commercial called *Daddy's Little Girl* tracing back a father's relationship with his daughter as recalled on her wedding day. The iconic brand may have died, but decades later the soul-stirring sentiment lives on.

Some of the most indelible memories aren't happy ones – and they are not even of our own doing. Soundcloud (whose offices were in the former Wall's 'death strip') created *The Berlin Wall Of Sound* on the 25th anniversary of the fall. Known as the most unbearable radio spot, it captured the lies told by politicians and the brutality of guards, in an acoustic reconstruction.

How do you truly appreciate art? You live in it. Art Institute Chicago made it a visceral experience by tying up with Airbnb and recreating *Van Gogh's Bedrooms!*

Flying experiences cue happy travel. And three airlines found creative ways to bring this to life. *West Jet Christmas* was an unforgettable festive surprise with wish-list gifts arriving on the baggage carousel. KLM helped stranded travellers of other airlines through their thoughtful *Happy To Help* outreach. And British Airways captured the *Magic Of Flying* on a billboard with a delightful toddler pointing real-time to every single BA flight that flew overhead.

The *ALS Ice Bucket Challenge* was in itself a spine-tingling experience. But when Pat Quinn – creator of the challenge – lost his voice to the disease, *Project Revoice* recreated his original authentic way of speaking using advanced eye coordination and sound technology, giving the movement its rich timbre again.

We learn from what we have gone through, we evolve from events in our lives. So do brands. Successful relaunches are proof of that. Experience is a great marketing tool.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Life is the best reality check and events that occur shape our responses. Often, it is the reason for hardened stances and rejection of new ideas. Marketers find these to be barriers to messaging and blockades to brand switches. Diffusing the latent tension is tough but infusing a positive spin could be a more effective solution.

2

Never underestimate the power of nostalgia. There's something about yesterday that makes us want to go back there and relive that piece of our past. Marketing to that retrospective frame of mind is like tapping into the subconscious. And when times are tough, solace lies in how things used to be and wishing they'd come around again.

3

We all want to have a sneak preview of the future. We don't want to go in blind, but we do enjoy the anticipation and excitement. Luckily, predictive tools and technologies can arm us better and keep us ahead of the curve. Who wouldn't wish for a better-prepared customer with a greater propensity for experimentation?

9

I am
my
aspirations

Much has been said about the aspirational consumer. No matter how evolved we are as buyers or where we are in the purchasing power hierarchy, there is always something on our bucket lists that defines our personal desires and dreams.

We set our hopes as high as we think possible, but when we are spurred by advertising stimuli that ask us to reach for the skies, we almost begin to believe in the impossible. And that is the power of messaging.

Brands have been quick to attach goal-oriented motives in their communication for this very reason, because it develops a strong behavioural pattern – a pattern of bettering ourselves, enhancing our skills and improving the quality and meaning of our lives.

Marketers have come to understand that we all need a badge to wear proudly and a manifesto to believe in – and that could well be the logo itself and its set of values. Which is why brands that aim to create a better future are winning the hearts of socially-minded consumers.

Aspirational consumers are driven to brands that demonstrate constant innovation, outline a clear purpose and have strategies for positive impact. To them, brand hugging and tree hugging are not disparate things. And ‘the right thing to do’ is indeed ‘the cool thing to do’.

The two powerful strategies for aspirational advertising have been facilitated affiliation and indirect self-affirmation. Because, ultimately, we all want to belong with the good and feel good about ourselves in the process.

Millennials, the most sought after consumer set today, are surprising marketers with their demands of brands. If brands don't add to culture and sustainability, if they do not support a progressive lifestyle and candid self-expression, they will find no traction in the future.

Today's consumers are socially-conscious materialists. We now want style, shopping and status – but want them coupled with sustainability. Our definition of happiness seems to have gone beyond possessions and privileges to become more holistic.

Unilever saw this shift early. Their inspirationally-engaging *Project Sunlight* was launched with the goal of making lives better, by co-opting consumers across their spectrum of brands into their higher purpose and dream for the world.

Apple's Christmas ad *Share Your Gifts* showcased product superiority and brand sheen on the one hand, with the user's ability to be more productive and prolific on the other.

To the challenged, a level playing field is a wish they'd love fulfilled. Microsoft Xbox did just that with *Change The Game*, making Xbox features overcome disabilities so they could play in the mainstream.

More recently, *#HopeJoanna* has powered the collective aspiration of South Africans with a renewed sense of optimism and the tenacity to emerge triumphant, despite the toughest obstacles.

In the early days of Google Chrome, an endearing campaign *Dear Sophie* captured a father's dreams to create a world of possibilities for his daughter.

Gillette's ambition for its target audience was showcased during the thick of the Me-Too movement. *We Believe: The Best Men Can Be* was

a controversial campaign urging men to hold each other to a higher standard and step up when intervention was needed.

An aspiration is ongoing – it is the gift that keeps on giving. *Endless Stories* by Getty Images strung together archived ringside images of the fight of the century between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier – in a pictorial demo of limitless possibilities.

Yet again, Adidas underlined the same point with *Original Is Never Finished*, proving that things can be done again – and better than before – if you set out to do it and do it your way.

It all boils down to our potential – what we can become. Brands with encouraging, rousing messages often play to our deepest, most unspoken yearnings, energising and accelerating them with brand promise.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Aspiration always flies in the face of the odds. It refuses to be hemmed in by negativity and even sees opportunity in constraints. Marketers have fuelled that feeling by demonstrating their own defiance of the status quo. When a brand energises the consumer dream with a can-do spirit, it becomes the messenger of hope.

2

It is all about seeing the doughnut and not the hole. Unforeseen global catastrophes, economic recessions, lockdowns and downturns force us to prove our renewed relevance in changing scenarios. Without the mental stamina to confront reality, it is impossible to navigate out of it. Staying positive is half the battle won.

3

Ambition often benchmarks itself against the successful. Icons and super-achievers will inspire us with their rags-to-riches stories. The belief that we can author our own futures is a powerful one. For brands too, the mission is to blaze a whole new business trail through the crowded and competitive marketplace.

10

I am

my

brand choices

Choices. Everywhere we turn, every minute of the day. It's all about the decisions we make. And any moment of wavering is a great intervention point for brands.

We take calls on so many aspects of our lives – not just our purchases but our homes, our relationships, our lifestyle, what we watch, what we cook, what we wear, what goes into our presentations, what we read, who we friend/tag/retweet – right down to ice cream flavours, lipstick shades, hairstyles, pizza toppings, emojis. The list goes on.

When it comes to what we buy, however, a lot more than practicality is at play. There's peer pressure, image perceptions, biases and beliefs, pricing, deals and offers.

And then there is the deeper layer of purpose and brand mission. The brands we buy have to demonstrate their goodness gene.

There are many questions emanating from one single choice. How do I know it is right? What does it say about me? Have I missed a better opportunity? Will I regret this tomorrow? How best can I use what I have bought? Have I extracted maximum value for money?

Brands pro-actively answer these by providing post-rationalisation fodder. The inventor of FAQs must surely have seen this coming. Customer care IVR systems have used this as the very framework of their intuitive responses.

Because at each of the stages of the consumer buying cycle – trigger, search, consider, choose, buy, experience, repurchase and advocate – brands face the challenges of vacillation, flirtation and temptation.

These are times when a brand has to add to the consumer's story. It has to be part of the fabric of his or her life. It has to become a verb in everyday conversation.

Toms Shoes did exactly that. Founder Blake Mycoskie, on his travels through Argentina, saw a way to help children who were going barefoot, by creating a for-profit brand with giving at its core. For every pair of shoes sold, a pair of shoes would be donated. By buying into the Toms ethos, customers showcased their generosity.

Often, brands thrive on polarisation. After all, positioning is the art of sacrifice and arrogating a select audience is better than trying to appease everyone all the time. Marmite nailed this – with their *You Either Love It Or Hate It* campaign.

And we define ourselves by doing the Marmite on other categories – iOS or Android, Louis Vuitton or Hermès, Tag Heuer or Rolex, Levi's or Diesel, Mac or PC, Aston Martin or BMW, Pepsi or Coke, Whopper or Big Mac, *Just Do It* or *Impossible Is Nothing*.

And forget products within the supermarkets, it's the supermarkets themselves who are in competition. Lidl's *Vote For Meal* did a cheeky hijack of political posters for its salience-boosting drive, while Tesco chose the emotional *Food Love Stories* route, co-opting customers into the narrative.

Sometimes, brands need to eradicate negative perceptions in order to become a viable choice. *Track My Macca's* was one such interactive campaign from MacDonald's that allowed consumers to trace the ingredients in their food right down to the farm it came from.

Exercising one's choice in the face of opposition is a challenge that can only be solved creatively. In Russia, displaying the LGBTQ Pride flag was

a punishable crime. So soccer fans wore team colours and moved around in the order of the rainbow – red for Spain, orange for Holland, yellow for Brazil, green for Mexico, blue for Argentina, purple for Colombia – creating a *Hidden Flag* that became apparent in all the social media pictures that followed.

Then there are brands that ask us to choose ourselves, making us the centre of their universe. L'Oréal has always reminded us to go for it *Because We're Worth It*, encouraged by celebrities no less.

P&G chose to have *The Talk* about bias – a commercial that shows us that it's not the slur but how we choose to respond that matters – and that black is beautiful.

Brands are often at forks in the road where they have to make life-altering choices. And pretty much like us, they too have to live with the choices they make. Often, admitting honestly to failure endears them to audiences who like to see them as real and human.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

Increasingly a brand without a clearly-outlined purpose stands to lose ground. Customers are interrogating companies on their sustainability charter, their fair trade practices, the causes they champion. And marketers beware: they are not going to accept PR rhetoric or vision statements without genuine on-ground effort.

2

A single customer displays disparate online and offline behaviours. While online comes equipped with all the logical metrics for post-rationalisation, offline affords an undeniable tactile experience. Brands must address the purchase funnel based on how consumers want to be perceived and interacted with in both worlds.

3

Brands that carve out category niches consciously choose a focused target set over general demographics. Customers are drawn to the narrative because it now narrows down the choice for them, so much so that it almost feels made-to-order. Personalisation of product features is the new game changer, bespoke is the future.

11

I am
my
social footprint

Ever since social media became a phenomenon, conversations have been going swimmingly for brands. Social media speaks to the individuality of consumers and plays to their need to express, share and be part of a thread.

The bite-sized formats, that too in an attention-challenged economy, force brands to bring their A-game to the medium, making for some path-breaking campaigns that innovate, bend and even break the rules.

Social media comes with its own grammar and etiquette. Marketers are discovering refreshing ways of engagement, sparking off dialogues, addressing customer issues, seeding and beta testing product concepts, researching and mining insights – and of course, exploding the campaign idea on the social web.

There is a pattern to the way we engage – what we post, how we share, who we follow. We can choose to be active or passive, seen or unseen, famous or anonymous. This flexibility allows us to dip in and out at will.

But our footprint is highly measurable, making us a rich source of advocacy. Reputation management, rumour redressal, launch buzz

generation and disruptive communication all work in this space to boost a brand's presence exponentially.

Social media has seen the rise of a new breed of influencers – beyond celebspeak. They create highly-followed, liberally-shared, hyper-engaging content – content that brands are happy to hitch their wagons to.

Whether it is Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn or even Snapchat and WhatsApp, communities are mushrooming everywhere and networking for individual and common good.

And yet, we ask ourselves often enough – who are we within these communities? Will we be nameless, faceless statistics or will we be seen for who we really are? How do we make our contribution count?

Today, campaigns are arrogating and owning certain social spaces, making them their lead media. Because nearly half the world's population can be accessed in this fast, inexpensive and super-smart way.

Fiat Abarth disrupted Twitter to play up the car's speed factor by making it *Too Fast To Follow*. By losing a million followers, it gained a million shares for its tactics and a super-high recall of its selling proposition.

Volvo's *Interception* appropriated Superbowl without even being on air. It hijacked audience interest by making viewers post on social media when other car ads were running on TV. It took the eyeballs off the big screen rife with competitors and onto the small one which it dominated.

Nike, a brand that thrives on social media, saw an opportunity in the youth of London. They turned their logo into LDNR just for this segment and launched it through T-shirts on their social handles. The massive momentum around this led to the trending film on being tough – *Nothing Beats A Londoner*.

Burger King must be mentioned here again – whether it is *Whopper Detour*, *Traffic Jam Whopper* or *Burn That Ad*, the brand has always brought its cheeky and daring best to the social web. When Kanye West tweeted his preference for MacDonald's, Burger King literally flame-grilled him with their *Explains A Lot* response – making it the most liked branded tweet.

P&G's brand Always aimed to instil confidence in girls at the critical time of puberty. They took to YouTube to redefine the meaning of the negative phrase *Like A Girl* by turning it into something amazingly positive.

The daring *Exclusive The Rainbow* social media stunt targeted the entire campaign to one person – Skittles superfan Marcos Menendez. The result

was a Superbowl first – a hundred million viewers tuned in to watch him watch his ad.

In a market that waits for the latest in smartphones, how do you sell the concept of refurbished ones? Back Market decided to use *Refurbished Tweets* – by locating celebrity tweets from past years about the phone models they once desired and replying to them years later! This made it the biggest influencer campaign ever – and it was all free.

The social media appreciation for the *Booster Tag* – a safety campaign run by RACV and TAC – speaks for the initiative. Any child who fits the clothes that have the Booster Tag on them still needs to travel in a booster seat. A simple intervention at an easy-to-recall moment – shopping for kids clothes.

There is a reason why corporate figureheads are consciously leaning forward and building value on social media. Because it is now the playing field of brands who know how to ride the wave of consumer sentiment.

Me-isms – thought starters for our times

1

We consume social media for a host of reasons. Posts = information, posts = self-expression, posts = public barometer, posts = opinion, posts = protest, posts = recommendation. Knowing which aspect of our social behaviour to tap into, is half the job of communication. Knowing how to steer the dialogue is the other.

2

Brevity is the soul of social media. Brands that can chisel a narrative in 280 characters or less know how to hook an audience. Consumers too are looking for quick answers, smart hacks, speedy service, nifty response times. It's the espresso of brand building – perks us up, refreshes our thinking and sparks off conversations.

3

If ever there was a lab where brand authenticity was tested, it is social media. Here, honesty and integrity will be measured in tweets, companies must be seen as no-makeup selfies. This is precisely why it is the best place for rumour and reputation management. Brands must deliver on promises or be called out. It's be true or be trolled.

12

I am
in
The Me Era

We live at the intersection of our opportunities – at the fulcrum of our potential. This is where brands and consumers reevaluate their roles, rethink their responsibilities and redraw the lines.

And this is what defines The Me Era.

It is what transpires when time meets place. Turning events into inflection points, moments into memories.

It is what happens between yesterday and tomorrow. Marrying experiences that are our past and aspirations that are our future.

It is what inspires both head and heart. Creating common ground for emotionality and rationality.

It is what simultaneously shapes self and world. Making us more conscious of our planet and its people.

It is what reframes product and purpose. Encouraging responsible business, eco-aware brands and sustainable practices.

And it is what impacts brand and consumer. Changing the dynamics of their relationship in readiness for shifting paradigms of the market.

The Me Era is all about brands turning into consumers of newer opportunities. At the same time, it is about consumers turning into distinctive personal brands.

It is the process of a dramatic role reversal. Over a handshake of equality and respect. Not merely to find success in the amazing symbiosis – but to celebrate it by paying it forward.

TIGRESS

I am my turf.

After 35 years in advertising, heading both the creative function and the business, I decided to use my MD and ECD experience to create Tigress Tigress.

Tigress Tigress is committed to being both digital-centric in its approach to integrated communication and consumer-centric in its approach to ideas and innovation. And I hope this reflects in everything I do.

As the name suggests, the agency is positioned very sharply and definitively to be a rare species. I believe that is what will separate it from the rest of the eco-system.

I'd like to think that it is aggressive in its hunt for marketing challenges, fearless and ferocious on the prowl for creative business solutions and fiercely protective of the idea and the team that created it. And whether it is winning business or winning global awards, I hope the benefits of the stripes I may have earned over three and a half decades will now directly accrue to Tigress Tigress.

Tigress Tigress has operations in Mumbai and London. The agency specialises in:

Bespoke integrated campaigns – with digital at the heart of the experience

Multicultural marketing – to address opportunities and challenges in ethnic communication

Purpose branding – ideas and initiatives to fuel brand mission and social responsibility

Category shoulder niches – creating opportunities in untapped territories for the first-mover advantage

Behavioural economics – to create sharper brand stimuli and nuanced storytelling

A 5-breakthrough mandate – in business model, strategic insight, creative idea, technological innovation and social groundswell

The Rainbow Hashtag™ – the red cross for health and social causes, the blue cross for animal welfare and protection, the green cross for ecology and environment, the yellow cross for fitness and sport

**I will not be shackled by those tame stereotypes
I was born free to celebrate my different stripes**

Meera Sharath Chandra

TIGRESS
tigresstigress.com

D I F F E R E N T
STRIPES
different-stripes.com

meera@tigresstigress.com

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“In a world saturated with marketing advice and meaningless buzzwords, Meera Sharath Chandra has created a wonderfully elegant, simple and powerful way to examine the central question: how has the rise of self-actualization, and the shift of power to the individual, affected brands – and how can those brands reflect back the humanity in all of us? Looking at the world’s best marketing ideas through the lens of what it means to be human, she has created a blueprint for marketing in today’s world. And not an annoying buzzword in sight.”

Philip Thomas

Chairman

Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity