

# The Provocateur



Why brands are doing  
the right thing wrong

**Wavemaker**

Before the global pandemic, Purpose Marketing was the subject of increasing cynicism in many parts of the world, with brands accused of woke-washing and tapping into social change for profit. Consumers are still rightly wary of brand activism, but COVID-19 has changed things. The best brands have proven their worth by taking action and providing real help – demonstrating that all brands need to back their do-good messages with substance.

It feels like the industry also has newfound energy to make this change. The agenda for 2020 Lions Live (the virtual stand-in for Cannes Lions) is bursting with purpose, from P&G's [‘Stepping Up – Creativity as a force for good’](#) to Highsnobiety's [‘Better living through advertising’](#).

But that's not to say everyone is getting it right. In our home market of India, where commerce has a history of activism, many brands are still doing the right thing in the wrong way. We can see four pitfalls to avoid:



# 01

## Cause crowding

An increasing number of brands are trying to replicate the success of their socially conscious competitors but struggling to get the formula right – often falling into the trap of confusing a cause with an ad-theme.

The result is that too many brands are trying to leverage the same cause with the same messaging and even the same execution – creating zero impact on consumers. This was brilliantly captured by Youtuber Microsoft Sam in ['Every Covid-19 Commercial is Exactly the Same'](#) released in the early days of lockdown. As one of the thousands of user comments puts it, 'It's like watching television designed by algorithm.'





# 2

## Missing the point

Every right-thinking person and brand backs equality for all meaningful social change. But that doesn't provide a platform or a purpose for your brand. Purpose needs to connect to something deep within the brand – its product, its heritage, its DNA. The magic happens when marketers can convincingly answer the following questions:

- Why should my brand do it?
- Why should **only** my brand be able to do it?

A good example is personal care brand, and one of our Indian clients, Savlon. Savlon committed itself to the health and hygiene of Indian children with the [Healthy Hand chalk sticks](#) campaign in schools, infusing chalk with soap which children would wash off before their midday meal. This is purpose at its practical best – useful for consumers and clearly connected to the brand, so both benefit.

# 3

## More action, less talk

Purpose marketing invites scrutiny from consumers, as it does affection when it's done right. Now more than ever, consumers can spot empty messages at a glance. People care what brands think – but they are moved by what they do.

One of the best examples in recent Indian history is Tata Tea. In 2014 Tata launched [Power Of 49](#) asking Indian women – 49% of the total electorate – to 'Wake Up' to their often ignored right to vote. Millions of women responded by sharing the issues that impacted them most. The brand collated these in a manifesto which was publicly passed on to the leading parties in the upcoming elections.

Then in 2018, the brand asked Indians to awaken before the alarm goes off – pushing Indians towards pre-activism rather than activism. Driving mass conversations around various social issues, Tata gathered 1.8Mn signatures to petition the Central Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry to include gender sensitivity education as part of the school curriculum and to make sports education compulsory in schools.





# 04

## **Mentally available, not mental availability**

COVID-19 has changed consumer behaviour. In India as elsewhere, job losses, salary cuts and businesses shutting down have put a strain on wallets. Consumers are being forced to re-evaluate the role of various categories in their lives – and decide what is necessary and what is not.

This makes it a really tough time to launch a new product. It's not enough to be functional – to make it onto the necessities list in 2020, a product needs meaning. Marketers need to ask, 'How do I drive Mental Availability when consumers are not Mentally Available?'

Another of our clients, Mondelez brand Cadbury Dairy Milk, asked Indians to take a moment to acknowledge the unacknowledged by saying [Thank You](#), building on its brand platform of goodness with a campaign about generosity. Mondelez India has also committed part of the proceeds from the sale of the bars to health insurance policies for daily wagers, employees with no holiday or sickness pay. A great example of doing good and helping a brand stay relevant in times when indulgence is the last thing on most of our minds.

Avoid 'Cause Crowding' with a clear and individual message. Ensure your purpose connects with your brand's DNA and that it leads to direct action and meaningful results. Be authentic and work to stay relevant in a post Covid industry landscape.



Any questions? We're here to help.  
Please contact Wavemaker India

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