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**BRAND  
LEADERS**

JOSEPH GEORGE



## **SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CHANGED THE BRAND NARRATIVE**

*Joseph George, Chief Executive  
Officer, Lowe Lintas & Partners,  
shares his views on Brands and  
modes of communication*

**I**n an ever changing communication landscape, where content is getting more personalised, how are brands coping with this challenge?

I believe that the proliferation of brands, the increasing cost of customer contact and the rapid de-mystification of technology, have permanently shifted the locus of power to the consumer. Given this, I believe smarter brands are not just trying to better understand “consumer interests” but also, what drives “consumer involvement”. So while brands have traditionally been doing reasonably well in the former, the challenge today is to understand how to drive and sustain the latter. So it is not just about creating ideas that are relevant but which consumers can and want to belong to and be involved with. No brand today can hope to establish inspiring connections with its consumers without having interests, ideas and involvement at the heart of its effort.

**What new creative ideas are brands looking for in their communications?**

I think brands today offer a great opportunity for consumers to live vicariously through them. And which is why more than ever before, Brand Purpose, Brand POVs, etc. mean a lot more than it ever did. So among a host of other opportunities, I think brands should also be looking at creative ideas that allow this need to be satiated. And more often than not, brands that leverage the creative-technology-media axis in their ideation and execution stand a better chance to meaningfully and uniquely leverage this need of consumers.

**How do you think social media is changing the brand communication process today?**

Social media gaining ground has changed and will change the narrative of brands. Most brands will need to get more conversational and this

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therefore has an implication not just on content but on the tone it adopts too. The preponderance of social media in our lives has also made brands both careful and excited about the opportunities. Excited because, great ideas can spread and generate conversation and buzz almost instantaneously which could lead to participation and involvement and eventually to belonging. Careful because getting it wrong could “break bad” as rapidly. **How are creative people walking the thin line between tradition and modernity when it comes to developing brand communications, especially in a country like India?**

I believe agencies are realising the need to think “engagement” and “involvement” a lot more and a lot upfront when it comes to developing brand communications today. Having said that, I personally believe that too much has been made out in painting out offline media and online media as two completely different worlds. More and more clients and agencies are acknowledging the primacy of the idea in both cases. Both are acknowledging the role of story telling in India in both cases. And both acknowledge that most creative people have already gone personally digital via Facebook, Flipkart, Foursquare and Flipboard. And mobile telephony is doing an incredible job in hastening this convergence!

**Which ad campaigns have been the most memorable for you?**

Unfortunately, but understandably, all my examples are from Lowe Lintas; and all of which were conceived, created and executed by us in the past

18 months – Tanishq (Re-marriage), Lifebuoy (Help a Child Reach 5), ICICI Pru (Bandhe Achche hain), Hindustan Unilever Ltd (Kaan Kajura Tesan), Kissan (Kissanpur), Idea (Ulloo mat banana), Tata Tea (Power of 49), Havell's (Hawa Badlegi), Economic Times (India against Half Knowledge) and Johnson & Johnson (Power of Gentle).

Each of these examples are a refreshing take on the category they operate in, true to each of their brand worlds and leaves behind something for consumers to think about, talk about and feel involved. The other reason I chose the above examples are because these are examples of great work done on established brands. And that is never easy.

**As a high-pressure industry which runs on ideas, how do people combat the problem of fatigue, burnout and blocks in the industry?**

They are realities of our profession and it can never be wished away. But its incidence can definitely be regulated. Regular but planned change of brands, clients, offices, responsibilities and even teams go a long way in managing this. When they have chosen to, clients too have played a very critical role in helping agencies cope with this issue.

**Which people, according to you, truly redefined the Indian advertising industry and why?**

Oh there are far too many for me to name. Also, I would definitely mention a lot many fantastic clients too who have played a critical role in the evolution of the advertising industry in India.