



## Shattering Transgender Taboos – The Power of Marketing

### SANDEEP:

Hello everyone, thank you for joining this session, **Shattering Transgender Taboos – The Power of Marketing**

### SANDEEP:

- My name is Sandeep Nair, and I am Programme Associate at Community Business, and I will be your moderator for this session.
- As a thought leader and champion of diversity and inclusion, Community Business recognises that many in our society are disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.
- Committed to promoting responsible and inclusive business practices, we strongly believe that companies have a critical role to play in creating opportunities for disadvantaged or under-represented groups to participate more fully in society.
- The transgender community, who represent an estimated half a million in India, is one of the most misunderstood communities in India.
- This despite the fact that throughout our history, transgender individuals have always been a visible part of our Indian culture and society.
- Our goal at Community Business is to pioneer and inspire organizations by showcasing leaders and individuals who are challenging assumptions and disrupting the norm in their communities and workplaces in India to bring about positive change.
- So in this session, we discuss the power of bold marketing efforts to shift social attitudes and tackle discrimination.
- Uploaded on Vicks India's YouTube channel in March 2017, P&G's Touch of Care video has received over 6.9 lakh views and sparked open discussion on a topic that has long been regarded as taboo in India.
- Based on the true story of Shree Gauri Sawant, the ad is narrated by the daughter, Gayatri, who describes how she was orphaned and then adopted. She describes with great affection her relationship with her mother. At the end of the spot, it is revealed that Shree Gauri, her mother is in fact transgender.

### *Pause*

- Let us watch the clip of this heart touching advertisement which impacted a positive change and challenged assumptions around the concept of motherhood and the transgender community.

<< Video clip with English subtitles >>

### SANDEEP:

That was indeed a very heart- touching and emotional ad.

- So, now let us talk to the people behind this ad – Maithreyi Jaganathan and Shree Gauri Sawant. We will discuss their motivation, the responses and the role such bold marketing efforts can play in tackling discrimination.



Today we have with us, Maithreyi Jagannathan.

*Maithreyi Jagannathan is a passionate and accomplished marketing leader with over 13 years of experience of working in the leading FMCG company in the world – Procter and Gamble. Within P&G she has led brand building across several geographies and multiple brands (haircare, skincare and consumer health care). She has been leading Vicks India business over the last few years.*

*Maithreyi was part of the team that created the “Touch of Care” Vicks campaign in India and successfully led the expansion of this campaign in other markets like Philippines. The Vicks #touchofcare India campaign was extremely successful in driving the brand growth and also received multiple awards across Asia.*

*Under her leadership Vicks India also won the most prestigious “Brand of the year – special commendation” award from CNBC TV 18. She is an avid skill based volunteer and has helped train over 60 NGOs on marketing via the P&G Pro Bono School Forums..*

Welcome Maithreyi.

**MAITHREYI:**

Thank you.

And we also have with us, Shee Gauri Sawant.

*Gauri was born and raised as a boy in a conservative family in Pune. At a very early age of 9, after her mother's death, Gauri realised that she is different from others.*

*Gauri underwent transition with the help of Humsafar Trust. It was a struggle, but Gauri formed an NGO of her own called 'Sakhi Char Chowghi' in Malad, Mumbai.*

*Shree Gauri was part of the Vicks ad in India that went viral.*

*Today Shree Gauri promotes safe sex and provides counselling to transgenders from the Mumbai suburbs. She is also the petitioner of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgement that was passed in 2013.*

*Three years after the Supreme Court recognised transgenders as a third gender, her community is still striving for basic civic rights.*

Welcome Shree Gauri.

So, I would also like to add that in this session, Shree Gauri will be speaking in Hindi., because that is the language she is most comfortable with.

So, I'd like to start by asking Maithreyi: With this advertisement, you have established a reputation as one of the first organisations to have shattered taboos around transgender individuals and non-traditional families in India. Tell us a little bit about the background to this campaign and how this came about.

**MAITHREYI:**

Thank you, Sandeep, and once again a huge thanks for this opportunity. It's great to be talking to you in this forum and a really very good opportunity for us to share the story of touch of care and the background behind that. So, Vicks has been the number one brand for cough and cold globally and it's been in India for over 70 years. And it has a mix of products starting from Vicks VapoRub, Vicks cough drop, inhaler etc. And, historically we've been known as a grandmother's remedy, so you ask anyone what they think of Vicks the first thing that comes to their mind is that my mum used to apply to me when I was a kid. That's the first memory that the brand has



come. Now inherently the brand was always known for family and care. Because most of our campaign on VapoRub showed a mother and a child. But what was happening is that because of the brand we were shown as only a cough and cold solution. I only use Vicks when I only have a cough or a cold and that's the only association that we were building, so we actually wanted to elevate the role of the brand towards the core of the brand itself which is family and care, and we stood for that and millions of people to ensure that we take that in a very different way and to showcase in such a way that it will really touch millions of consumers and millions of people through the brand. So that's how the campaign came up as we started. And when we heard Gauri's story our agency had to work with that story - there was no other better way for us to bring to life the aspect of family and care than that story. The first time we heard it we just went ahead with it there were absolutely no questions, or anything asked on why this story, that was how powerful her story was.

**SANDEEP:**

Definitely. Shree Gauri, I would like to ask you, how did you first hear about this concept and what inspired you to be part of this advertisement and tell your story?

**SHREE GAURI:**

- Hello and this is my first time coming live like this in my life. Being a transgender, I never thought I would come and speak with all of you. I am quite nervous, but I hope I can! Well Vicks P&G called me and asked me about my story. And that time I said wow this is a good opportunity because I say every time that motherhood is a behaviour and a mother can be anyone, you are just labeling it as it is not only a woman can be a mother, we don't have to say like this. Everyone is mother - he is mother, she is mother, everyone is mother over here. We must know what motherhood is. My own family refused me, I was migrant from my family. No one touched me with care, and the advertiser who contacts me asked me for touch of care. So, there was no question of saying no. This was also for me being a community leader with the ability to bring my community up, because people will think even transgenders can do this and they are a part of the society. This was a good opportunity for myself and my community to come ahead because we are doing such a good thing.

**SANDEEP:**

So, again, next question to you again Gauri, what kind of challenges have you faced growing up as a transwoman in India? In your experience what are some of the biggest say problems that transwomen in India face?

**SHREE GAURI:**

I was born as a Ganesh. I was born as a male and doctor says to my parents that you have a male child. But I was not a male - a woman was here. I always say gender when you talk about gender it is not here, it is here. You should understand a woman was trapped in male body. It was not easy for myself to come out because I was coming from a very middle-class orthodox family and my family were not ready to accept me. And this is same with everyone. Almost every trans men or trans women also had parents who were not ready to accept them. Being in India we have the transculture we have ardhnari ,nateshwar, we have shikandi. Everything is there in the Mahabharata and the puran (mythological texts). But they don't want to accept it. So same when I was born - the unwanted baby in the family no one wanted to talk with me and my



friendship circle was very small. I never used play with boys and girls even though I was alone, simply because of the bullying and the harassment every time I tried. And I started growing up like that with my identity. In my school no one was ready to accept me. If you see in our curriculum in the education also there is nothing written about transgender or sexuality there is nothing. Now I cannot even blame anyone. There was nothing in the curriculum that people could understand. Even I was confused. I needed counselling, even my parents were confused and wanted counselling on both sides.

One day I left my house and I ran away, and it was not easy, I had to leave my family and I join my hijra gharana (Hijra Family). When I ran away from my family I was very happy and when I was on the street I never wanted to go for begging or sex work. But only wearing female clothes was making me a powerful woman. Try to understand that when I was wearing a saree and I let it be a dirty, ugly saree but I was standing on the street I was just standing like this. Then a wonderful woman suddenly someone give me 10 rupees. Then I realised what am I doing. I don't want to be begging. I was crying. That was the reality. You know I also wanted to see my community not only begging, I respect my gurus I respect my gharana. When the British came the transgenders worked in the harams, they were in the palace. But now we are in the streets, why?

Why? Who is going to answer? Society is always saying what is the value of what you are doing? But who is responsible for us. Now this is the time that we are raising our voice going to Supreme Court and it is a shame for me because going to knock on the Supreme Courts door I feel shame. Bharat constitution says I am Indian citizen. They are not seeing anywhere male or female. So, who the hell I am? I did not want to go for sex work and do something. So it's like this.

#### **SANDEEP:**

Maithreyi, so, what are some of the biggest issues that you have observed – and what issues did you want to put the spotlight on?

#### **MAITHREYI:**

Again, I think what Gauri narrated is what all of us have grown up seeing also right. I think all of us have experience of seeing people like Gauri. Again, I think my heart goes out to them. Specifically, from our stand point and I guess again going back to what I'd mentioned earlier Vicks is what we really wanted to showcase was care and family. And again, I think Gauri has made a very good point that Motherhood has no gender. And that's precisely what we wanted to bring to the forefront, is that a family is formed by care - it is not by traditional definitions like a father or a mother or a grandfather. It is formed through care. As a result, people in the family or parents or mother's gender shouldn't really discriminate. You shouldn't use gender to label anyone and that's what we wanted to talk about.

Care is what brings a family together. In this case Gauri and Gayathri, the bond that they formed despite not being related through blood despite not having the traditional roles that the society has. That story was what we really felt was good to share. And talk about and that lead to a lot of discussions was exactly around the points that Gauri mentioned. In fact, we had lot of articles that mentioned that motherhood had no gender. And when we saw such articles we felt it was really fulfilling because that was what we were trying to bring to the forefront. Without calling out you know the exact issues.



**SANDEEP:**

So, Gauri, talking about motherhood, how has your personal story challenged traditional stereotypes about being a mother? What kind of reactions have you faced from people after seeing the advertisement?

**SHREE GAURI:**

My entire life has changed after this. Thanks to P&G entire team they have taken care of the entire transgender community. Speaks in Hindi

<<To be given as subtitles on bottom of the video.

Starting at: 17:19; Ends at 19:19>>

My life changed in a day – if you will see people's attitude towards transgenders was very bad. People cannot digest the fact that even we can become mothers or even we can live with someone, even we have a need for a family, yet people never see us with this idea in their minds. Even when I used to go out with my little girl – it was not as if everyone was accepting me – there have been people asking is this transgender taking this child to a wrong place, and then there have been people wondering how happy the child looks with this transgender. So, there are 10 types of mindsets and I have to prove each time. Like if you hold a glass bowl and walk around then you know that you have to be very careful – taking the responsibility of a child, whose mother is HIV positive, who was going to be forced into sex work ...all you think about is that I have to save a life. So just try and understand that for me a human life has a lot of value, I have seen life being away from family and I did not want to see a child going into that life. During my childhood I would say that I want to be a mother, but I did not have a uterus, so I could never become a mother. God had not given me a uterus, but he gave me a heart, so when Gayathri came into my life and she kept her tiny hand on my stomach and slept and that's when I realized that no...you don't need a uterus and she had completed my motherhood. When I am with children I notice that people have homophobia, transphobia, they feel that we would sexually abuse children, or we will do something wrong with the children – this one advertisement changed my life. It forced people to think – even trans people are good people and they can prove themselves. All we need is an opportunity, why should we be relegated to sex work or begging? It's very important to get an opportunity, if you are a citizen of independent India then it is our right, it is our fundamental right in addition to food, clothing and shelter we have the right to stand on our own feet and earn our livelihood.

**SANDEEP:**

True Gauri. And I must add that when I saw the advertisement, the scene when you were walking away from your daughter, I saw my mother in you.

So, Maithreyi, just to add, so what are the kind of issues has this film raised? How has it helped to challenge deeply rooted assumptions about both transgender individuals and motherhood?

**MAITHREYI:**

So, I think what Gauri mentioned was perfect. Whether it is a transgender or whether it is an orphan everybody deserves a touch of care. And that's what we were trying to call out right? You can be anyone in the world any kind, but you have the right to be cared for. You have the right to be have a family. It doesn't matter whether you are a transgender or whether you were sexually abused. Or whatever that is and that's what we are trying to call out that family does not need to be in the traditional format. Like you know I like the part where she mentioned that today you don't have a uterus but today you have the best family that you could have asked for. Gayatri and you, and the love that you share. Even when we did the campaign the way she spoke about Gayatri a lot of what was done in the campaign was true. Even though the protagonist was



different that was exactly taken from her life instances.

So that's what we're trying to call out and we are glad that people are recognising that everybody has the right to have a family. Everybody has the right to have care. It doesn't have to be labelled. It doesn't have to come through the traditional family route. It could be anyone you care for becomes the family for you. I'm sure for lot of you especially for people in this generation people who have a lot of friends who are even more important as family and that's what we realised that more and more as we go care is what brings you all together.

**SANDEEP:**

So, there has been a lot of response to this film after being viewed by across the worlds, So, has there, is there, has there been anything that surprised you?

**MAITHREYI:**

I think the biggest piece was anybody who saw the campaign for the first time well not even the campaign when we share the story board no one had a question on why we chose a story like this. No one questioned this, and this is including our brand global leaders. In the country no one questioned us to why a brand like Vicks came up with a story like this. They just thought it was just the natural part of it. So that's what I think was the surprising thing. Yes, there was a few barriers here and there, but at a very broad level the story was so powerful that it went through and for me it was that every time we showed this campaign whether internal or external including our CMO our chief marketing officer Mark Richard to consumers. I think the comments we got on how genuine the story was. The kind of comments that we got was completely overwhelming.

**SANDEEP:**

Very nice, so Gauri, what impact has this film made to you personally.

**SHREE GAURI:**

People have so much love for me that is what I am seeing. People used to get scared of transgender people. Now they just come to me and say you're the Vicks mother. I have seen your advertisement, you are such a great woman. And that boosts me and that makes my other transgender people empowered as a result. You know we are part of the society. Even if we are part of the society it is our duty to prove to ourselves. Give back to society. We have to do it. Advertisement has changed my entire life and world.

**SANDEEP:**

So, as you both know that this Conference is targeted at the corporate sector, I'd like to ask one final question to the both of you:

First, Maithreyi, What role do you think companies can play in creating a more equal society by tackling stereotypes in India? What is your single biggest request?

**MAITHREYI:**

I think for me the first piece is don't discriminate based on gender or any of these discrepancies. When looking at protagonist for your campaign look at stories that are really genuine. Look at what you want to tell and as you are looking don't keep any kind of filters. I think that would be my first request. Second is that this campaign has been extremely successful for us. So when we went out we were expecting probably 3 million views we ended up with 35 million views of



this campaign. Close to 20 million of this was all organic and this was because people were all sharing it on the social sites. We got multiple mentions from different celebrities. Like we had Vidya Balan (famous Bollywood actress) saying that I want to be a Vicks Ambassador. We had different celebrities sharing the campaign like Shashi Tharoor (LGBT+ supportive politician) . Again we never expected the kind of success. Even on the brand Matrix you can see it grow. Our top of Mind Awareness of the brand has really grown. We also saw the sales of the brand really impacted and also equity for the brand has gone to the next level.

If we had taken the normal route I don't think we could have seen this kind of result. We were telling such a compelling story which was the reason we got so much coverage and Gauri was taken back too. She sat with Amitabh Bachchan (famous Bollywood actor) and the campaign was shared there. We had BBC and all the Global networks share the story too. I am hundred percent sure that if we had taken a normal story, if he had not taken Gauri's story we would have not gotten anywhere close to the success that we got here. So, we just had a powerful story that we have here. My only request is if you are looking at campaigns if you want to tell genuine stories look at what is genuine and don't keep any filters before you go ahead with that. I think that's the biggest learning for me.

#### **SANDEEP:**

Wonderful. So, gauri before I ask what positive impact organisation can do by breaking stereotypes, I want to know a little more about about your NGO and about the work you do - Aji Ka Ghar?

#### **SHREE GAURI:**

Yes, Aji ka ghar is the concept that we are saving the girls who are sex workers kids. This is what the old transgenders are taking care of the abandoned girls. Our mission statement is that is that girls won't be going back into the sex work. We have 4 years-5 years aged girls. We are taking care of them. And our old transgenders are becoming grandmas, so our house name is *nani ka ghar* the old transgenders. We are building this and want to save the female children. We are getting the girls who have been thrown anywhere (abandoned)

Speaks in Hindi

<<To be given as subtitles on bottom of the video.

Starting at: 25:59; Ends at 26:40>>

This is bad ... there is a slogan by our government about saving the girl child. Whoever the child is it should not be impacted, and I feel it is my responsibility that if I can save a child's life, if I can save Gayatri's life then why not these girls too. That is the reason why we set up Aaji Ka Ghar and this is the first time that a transgender is running this, where they will not be abused. There are two benefits here I can bring the woman hidden within me to the forefront, I can share the culture and upbringing that I have been giving to my child and the child will stay in a safe environment. Her life will change. The entire centre is being run by transgender people and we take care of everything from giving the kids a bath, to food to everything.

This is not a shelter. This is a proper house. Where you are living at your grandma's house. First step is mother and next grandmother. So I am the grandma now.

So, on behalf of all of us here, we encourage everybody watching this video to contribute and help make this grandma's house for all little girls even better and help Gauri bring her wishes come true. Before we close this session, I would also like to ask Gauri, in terms of corporate sector, what do you think is the one thing corporates can do to bring a positive change?



### SHREE GAURI:

After Independence Day now we are celebrating everything. Now when we talk about gender equality when we are going to break the barrier when people say we are beyond gender why not? Give us the opportunity. If you don't give us an opportunity, we cannot prove ourselves. This is my humble request to everyone, touch of care only changed one life. We must think for every transgender person, as I don't want my sister, my mother, my colleagues to be on street and must do sex work, I want us to go to college. If I am capable, please give us opportunity. And we can prove it.

### SANDEEP:

That's all for now. Unfortunately, that is all we have time for.

- So, before we close on behalf of Community Business, I would like to thank Gauri, Shree Gauri Sawant and Maithreyi Jagannathan.  
So, before we close, Gauri, I would also like to add, that thank you so much for your time. Maithreyi, thank you so much for your time.

*Pause*

Earlier this year, we published our research: *Promoting Transgender Inclusion in India : What Role Can Companies Play?*

We encourage you to download and read this as it will give you a good understanding of the context of transgender issues in India and we hope, prompt your companies to think about what you can do.

You can download this from our website or contact me directly.

With that we must also add that, an active partner for organisations such as The Humsafar Trust, Solidarity Foundation, Payana etc. who do great work to support this community.

If you want to help Gauri fulfill her wish, please do reach out to us and we will help you connect with her.

*Pause*

- So with that, it just remains for me to thank you for attending this session and highlight that the recorded session will be available for download for 30 days. We also encourage you to share with your network.
- We have some great sessions lined up, so stay tuned.
- Thank you and Goodbye!





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