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TOP STORY

## “My biggest competition is consumer mindset”: Koshy George, Marico, CMO

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With the busy lives that we lead, healthy choices often take a backseat. This is the premise of Saffola’s latest campaign that has launched just in time for the upcoming occasion of World Heart Day. We had the opportunity to catch up with Koshy George, Marico’s chief marketing officer. George was appointed to the role in January 2019. Prior to this, he had a stint at Hindustan Unilever that spanned over almost 15 years and has worked on brand portfolios across personal care, home care and foods (including Dove, Lux, Lifebuoy, Sunlight).

He tells us that with their newest campaign, the larger objective is to drive awareness and relevance in the field of heart health. “When someone talks about health, they might address issues such as high cholesterol or diabetes. We want to educate people that small lifestyle habits such as not getting enough sleep — can have a serious impact on heart health. Driving awareness around that insight was the core part of our brief to the agency,” George said. The ads were created by the agency that handles Marico’s Saffola portfolio — Mullen Lintas.



We quizzed George on the casual tone of the ads, to which he replied that humour is a good way to deal with a grim topic such as heart health. “Usually, when you discuss heart health, it can strike fear in the minds of consumers. That doesn’t really motivate people to seek change or drive the right behaviour. Historically, that’s why we’ve always given our advertising a humorous tone — because humour is more sticky in people’s minds,” he said.

Next we spoke about rivals. Was Saffola competing with other oil brands or new age health brands such as Epigamia. George replied “My biggest competition is the mindset of the consumer. The core of my marketing campaigns lie in reminding people why it’s important to take care of their hearts. There is a minuscule set of people who will actually take the right steps to intervene and improve their heart health and lead a healthy lifestyle,” he said. Saffola, as a brand, works hard to drive relevance for heart health in India as Indians are at a huge risk of lifestyle related diseases such as diabetes, and heart problems. He claimed that this is also one of the biggest marketing challenges he faces.



Koshy George, CMO, Marico

“Other health brands, such as green tea, tend to focus on weight loss. It’s a more discernable and physical benefit; whereas heart health is not something you can physically feel — not unless you have a problem with it. That’s why it’s important for us to bring the mindset of our consumer into one of preventive care,” George explained.

Most oil ads and communications in this space tend to address the woman of the household, but according to George, the TG for these communications aren’t necessarily housewives. “My TG is anyone who is in the age group of 25-35. That is the time when your lifestyle starts having an impact on your health. In urban cities, we’re seeing a much higher risk of lifestyle related diseases,” he told us.

Despite the age bracket of his TG, George says that millennials are not necessarily going to be the growth drivers in the next six months. “They’re an important TG, but they’re not my core TG. A large part of our spends are on digital but we also invest a lot of money in TV and print. We work with relevant influencers (such as nutritionists) on the digital medium to create awareness,” he told us.

To create awareness regarding lifestyle habits that lead to heart risk, Saffolalife commissioned a survey, conducted by Nielsen, with 1226 respondents across key cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Some of the startling facts from the study revolve around the growing incidence of heart risk amongst those who are stressed or get inadequate sleep. According to the study, Mumbaiers show the highest incidence of heart risk, followed by Delhiites and then Hyderabadis. The study also revealed that 90 per cent of men and 91 per cent of women get insufficient sleep — they are at heart risk, and yet, they don’t consider it as a risk factor.

While discussing the digital medium, we asked him about how online retailers such as Big Basket, Grofers and Amazon’s Prime Now affect his bottomline numbers. He replied, “From a distribution lens it’s important that we work with all these retailers — they help make our products accessible. Fundamentally, I think there’s a big shift happening where a lot of urban metro shoppers are moving to these online channels.”

But it’s not just the urban audiences. Thanks to the introduction of Reliance Jio, George told us that he has seen penetration of digital content reach 70-80 per cent in Tier II and Tier III cities.

As far as selling products goes, he believes that the type of oil that Indians use to cook is deeply ingrained in them — that consumers are more likely to experiment with cosmetics and electronics brands, but not with the kind of oil that they buy and use. We asked him about food delivery apps and if the segment affects him. “When you’re ordering from an online app, you’re not sure of type oil your food is cooked in. But when a mother cooks food for her family at home, you can be assured that it’s what’s best for the family’s health. There’s no such assurance when it comes to food ordered online,” he concluded.