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“Our biggest competition
is sleep”!

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What's the most interesting thing you've done outside of work in the last 12 months?

Driving from Gurgaon to Mumbai via Udaipur. The drive is long but interesting as the route takes you through multiple cities with varied food and culture.

Name a brand marketing executive or corporate personality - Indian or international - you admire. And tell us what about her/him is admirable.

Elon Musk. Who would have believed, way back then, that we need another type of car? The phasing out of the internal combustion engine in itself is no mean feat! Add to that SpaceX and The Boring Company. The sheer magnitude of his vision and relentless execution driven by one man, in his lifetime, is 'inspiration overload'.

If your brand were an animal, what would it be - and why?

A dog! Dogs are human beings' best friends... they love and entertain unconditionally.

What was the biggest challenge you and your team faced in the last 6-12 months - and what did you learn from it?

When we launched India's first SVOD business with ALTBalaji, we changed the notion that India doesn't pay for content. We launched a subscription-only platform with six original shows, for which our annual marketing budget was less than the amount Netflix/Amazon spend on two big shows. In that budget we launched the brand, the platform and six shows... and we acquired paid subscriptions at an unprecedented scale, so much so that Reliance picked up stake in us!

The big learning was - the Indian consumer doesn't resist paying. It all depends on what you are selling! If it's exclusive, original, compelling and lends a functional experience, then people will be ready to pay and consume anything from Naagin to Narcos!

Which outside forces or trends impact consumer behaviour in your category most? Give an example.

The VOD business is riding on the explosive growth in the smartphone segment and the parallel drop in bandwidth prices. These two trends have created the perfect recipe for the growth of entertainment. This is 'personal entertainment', and not the kind of 'household' entertainment that TV offers. From a content perspective, India has either seen the three-hour movie arc or soaps with 100-plus episodes. The storytelling value chain, from writing to production, is going through a cataclysmic shift such that snackable 10-episode stories of 20-30 minutes per episode are consumed at scale.

Marketers across segments have fetishised the millennial. But hand on heart, which demographic will drive growth for your brand over the next 12 months?

With just 200 million TV households, India has been an entertain-

ment-starved country. So, hand on heart, almost all 1.2 billion people across India with smartphones and feature phones have started to consume entertainment in some shape or form, and the majority of them are doing it for the first time ever on the small screen. As one wise man said, "Our biggest competition is sleep"!

Nowadays brands get trolled all too frequently on social media. As a marketer, have your views on trolling changed in the last couple of years?

As marketers we have always considered social as an important medium for the "feedback loop". In the history of marketing, never has such a strong medium existed. It allows marketing teams to gather almost real-time feedback on products and value propositions. Trolling is an occupational hazard that comes with the medium, and brands should build capabilities to deal with it. Brands should be resilient enough to come out of it unscathed.

If you could advertise on only one medium for the next 6 months, what would that be - and why?

Digital! Never ever in the past, in a country like India, did the ability to reach 300-400 million people exist. Today, marketers have the ability to measure near real-time effectiveness of monies spent. At the same time, they have the ability to realign their budgets as per consumption, demography, geography and day.

What do agency partners grumble about most, today?

About keeping up with digital! ■