

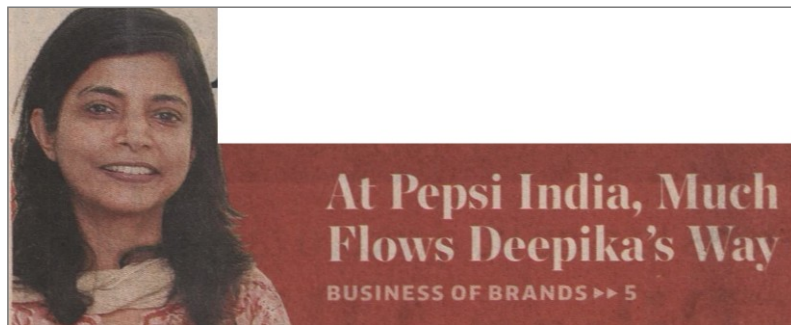
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At Pepsi India, Much Flows Deepika's Way

ET PROFILE

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For the country's only marketing professional to have 22 brands to oversee Deepika Warriier's task is challenging to say the least. Yet, the PepsiCo vice-president — beverages and foods — appears relaxed. "It's to do with the new matrix structure. We have 30-day or 60-day targets. There's a lot of role clarity now... earlier there was a little overlap," the IIM-Bangalore alumni says.

At 44, Warriier is perhaps the country's only, and PepsiCo's first official, to head marketing of both foods and beverages following a new 'power of one' restructuring the company's chairman and CEO D Shivakumar announced last fortnight.

The new role means Warriier, who has been heading beverage marketing since 2010, is now also returning to foods. Her key mandate, she says, is to find complimentary spaces between foods and beverages and optimise the full portfolio of brands.

Expectations from IPL are huge for which she as brand custodian has to live up to. As title sponsor, PepsiCo has chipped in a steep ₹400 crore for the five-year title sponsorship starting last season. "IPL wasn't a punt... we see it as a great fit," she says. Yet, the fact that IPL coincides with peak season for colas increases the stakes to deliver big results. "We debated on which is a better opportunity — IPL on broadcast or ground. Ground gives brands cultural insights which no other platform can," she says.

To keep the Pepsi brand contemporary, the firm has allocated 20% of IPL's ad budget on digital this year compared to 5% last year. Digital will also be the core platform for a new global identity brand.

Pepsi is in the process of rolling out. But Warriier needs to deliver in an environment where category growth is down to single digits. "The big task for Pepsi is to grow consumption in a category that has seen the impact of slowing down macros," she admits.

There are internal challenges as well. Rohit Ohri, chairman at Dentsu India group, who has worked closely with Warriier for over a decade, says: "Deepika has the talent of unifying diverse points of view into actionable direction. However, now that her team is so large, this task will



The big task for Pepsi is to grow consumption: Deepika Warriier

be quite daunting."

Then there's rival and category leader Coca-Cola, which industry watchers say, has extremely aggressive plans for the coming season.

Does Warriier miss the famous cola wars of the '90s that came to a grinding halt after the famous pesticides-in-cola episode? The backlash was so huge instead of taking potshots at each other, the companies became less fun and more business like. "I'd love to have a cola war on twitter. Why not? It's a fun category," she says.

Finally, there's the agency pressure. India is among the only few very countries where PepsiCo works with JWT. In most markets it is aligned with the Omnicom group agency BBDO. Ad industry circles say Warriier is under pressure globally to align with the Omnicom group. Also, JWT has been through a creative lacuna of sorts when many of their top officials quitting over the last two years. Choosing her words carefully, Warriier says: "Let's say I'm happier with JWT now... they have strengthened their planning processes."

Yet, the IPL campaign has been given to Taproot, for the second consecutive year.

Business associates mention Warriier's attention to detail and leveraging teams as strengths. A close associate, Babita Baruah, executive business director and VP at JWT Delhi, says: "She has a strong drive for perfection. There is never a compromise." Baruah recalls times, when, for Pepsi ads, Warriier gets involved even with minute perfecting details right up to consumption shots (or how the people shown in the ads hold the bottle).

Another top media professional, who interacts with Warriier regularly, says: "She's quieter in the market place, compared to many marketing heads. But she's very focused."

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