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#arewefutureproofed!

Having the pulse of the now and the new is critical in our profession as in every other business. If our practice does not keep pace with rapidly evolving consumer expectations, disruptions in the media landscape and opportunities offered by technology to sharpen our communication programme, we run the risk of becoming obsolete in the blink of an eye.

The concept of integrated communications which has been taking shape over years, is here for real, providing a level playing field for PR Consultants to score across PR, digital, media, influencer, social and creative. This requires us to pivot in our thinking beyond mere PR to advise brands on positioning, marketing, engagements, etc. We must therefore redefine our value proposition and cascade that system wide to change the traditional mindset of practitioners. It is critical to communicate, reinforce, and model the behaviour expected from practitioners to expect the same from organisations.

Authentic storytelling remains at the heart of what the PR profession has thrived on and this, will continue to champion our future too, but are we being culturally creative, and insight driven to connect with new cohorts? are we curating credible stories to impact change and communities? While creativity may be the currency of an integrated model, effective mining of data and deployment of technology to connect brands to customers has increasingly become more essential.

Similarly digital PR, which has become the chief discipline in our practice of communications, only makes sense when we use it to build relationships with audiences and communities who will in turn contribute to a conversation that unfolds across our content ecosystem. People find authentic content or recommendations by actual consumers to be more trustworthy than other in-your-face promotions and advertising by brands. This is reason enough for brands to actively nurture a community of advocates. We must not leave community advocacy to chance, but step in to help craft and manage a meaningful brand advocacy strategy. This set of loyal and vocal customers help humanise brands, boost brand appeal & trust, promote its products & services, provide invaluable user-generated content (UGC), word-of-mouth recommendations, and social media chatter.

We also have to be mindful of what could enhance the perceived value of businesses and companies. While reputation of an organisation is not limited to its environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) score; prospective clients, customers and investors may certainly be influenced by how a company engages with its employees or demonstrates dedication to sustainability, its carbon-neutral initiatives and broader social issues. PR practitioners need to therefore understand ESG well enough to table relevant solutions to organisations as investments.

I believe another area that needs attention to future proof our profession is having an enthused pipeline of talent! On the one hand, our profession needs to attract passionate and committed talent and on the other, we must keep our vast body of practitioners abreast of the new trends. With a generation flocking to join woke organisations, we need to consciously build culturally sensitive and diverse workplaces, devoid of hierarchy, prejudices and bureaucracy.

Unless we are adept at welcoming all that comes our way to mould our communication, we could find ourselves in a minority.

Archana Jain, Founder and Managing Director, PR Pundit

**As per a report published by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) in July 2022, there were 692 million active Internet users in India, split almost evenly between rural and urban India. The report's projected estimates 900 million Internet users in India by 2025.*