

# Reputation

## TODAY

A magazine for Public Relations and Corporate Communications Professionals

### FOCUS:

Political Communication

## Hornet's Nest Stirred?

He came and disrupted the stagnant world of Political Communications.

Is he an abrasion or is he here to stay?

### INTERVIEWS:

**DILIP CHERIAN**

“People centric structures crumble, institutions survive.

**NUPUR SHARMA**

“Articulation is a natural talent unless one spends years to master it.

**ALOK SANWAL**

“Government is no more selective in communicating with media.

# Our Time Is Now

Public Relations as a profession has come of age in India. Several leading consultancies are celebrating their silver jubilees. Corporate communications directors are getting a seat at the leadership table. In an era like this, it is heartening that India does not have its own media portal and a magazine that celebrates the profession. Reputation Today is one such endeavour, which we hope, will fill the gap through its sharp focus on offering more to the intelligent communicator of 2016.

Why a print magazine? You may ask. Well, print is not dying in India anytime soon. And when it does, we will be flexible to move to an online-only version. The communications business needs a media outlet that offers it its due. A place to exchange ideas and insights with compelling content. Fortunately, couple of India trade media outlets do offer some space to Public Relations and another couple of international portals keep a close eye on India. In all this, an India-focussed point of view gets missed out. Hence, the need for a Made In India communications portal dedicated to the craft we are all proud practitioners of.

The idea has been hovering around for a while but the ability to execute was taking time. After successfully organising four editions of PRAXIS, this seemed like a natural progression. The basic philosophy is the same as the theme of the first edition of the annual summit – Our Time Is Now! We want professionals to be able to carry around a copy of this magazine with pride. We want younger professionals to show this magazine to their parents. We want older professionals to show this to their children. We want corporate communications departments to keep a copy of this magazine in their office libraries. And we want consultancies to display this magazine at their reception for visitors to browse through. We are hopeful that this magazine will grow from strength to strength. And hopefully, move from a quarterly to a monthly in the years ahead.

We hope you enjoy reading these pages and keep coming back for more. We have shared our philosophy so you get to know us better. We can only grow by receiving your constant feedback. There is a lot in store. Let's start from here and take one swift step at a time.

## Our Philosophy

Values : Impartial, Insightful, Inspirational

Vision : To be the torchbearer for the future of the strategic communications profession

Mission : To offer a holistic business-to-business outlet for the intelligent communicator to gain inspiration and share insights



## Print line | .....

- Publisher

The PRomise Foundation

- Editorial Team

Lovejeet Alexander (India)

Anubhuti Mathur (India)

Aakriti Kaushik (Europe)

Chitrangada Maitra (North America)

Alejandra Brandolini (South America)

Geeta Singh (Africa)

Sunayna Shetty (Australia)

- Design

Blaq

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## From the Editorial Team | .....



The business of communications has greatly evolved in the last decade. We have seen it in the corporate sphere and we see it in the political arena. The first issue of Reputation Today is testimony to that evolution. We could not think of another focus area for our cover story in the inaugural issue other than Political Communications. Every subsequent issue will focus on a relevant topic that is growing in importance. We would like to hear from you on what topics to focus on, in the future.

Getting this issue off the ground was no easy task as the subjects of the story are men and women who shy away from the media. Prashant Kishor has been the topic of many a discussion ever since the current central government came to power. He became a hot topic and an even hotter commodity after the results of the Bihar elections in November 2015. There has not been such intense spotlight on one individual of the kind he has faced. We could not think of another person to feature on the cover.

The magazine will have some regular features. There will be a cover story that is backed by a debate, a guest column and a regular column. It will have two pages devoted to news. Most importantly it will have three interviews. One from a consultant, one from an in-house representative and one from a journalist. There will be a case study linked to the cover story. This package is a labour of love. And we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did putting it together.

We are grateful to several people who have contributed towards making this issue come alive. A special mention to Sunetra Rathnam and the team at Blaq for supporting this venture wholeheartedly. We are grateful to our advertisers who believed in us. We will greatly depend on you, our readers for feedback to make it better. We have spent several sleepless nights proofreading the copy. However, should you find errors bring it to our attention. Support us. Spread the word. Together, we will make history.

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Facebook - [www.facebook.com/ThePraxisMag](https://www.facebook.com/ThePraxisMag)

Twitter - @RepTodayMag

## PPR Worldwide Comes To India | .....



“As a strong believer in the power of insights-based communications, we are excited to introduce PPR in India.”

Australia based Professional Public Relations (PPR) Worldwide launched its India operations this January. A part of WPP, the world's largest communications services group, PPR has been in the public relations and strategic marketing communications business for more than 45 years. The consultancy started its India operations with offices in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

The core start-up team at PPR South Asia comprises Vandana Sandhir as Country Lead, Bhuvnesh Chawla as Business Lead and Mona Puri as Managing Partner, North. Before joining PPR, Vandana was the India Practice Chair, Corporate & Financial, at Genesis Burson-Marsteller. She comes with 20 years of experience in communications.

Commenting on the launch, Richard Lazar, Managing Director and CEO of PPR Asia-Pacific said, “India is an important milestone in our international expansion given the potential for future growth in the marketing and communications industry here. We are confident that we will continue to build on our promise of being a creative and an integrated specialist that finds the right solutions for our clients.”

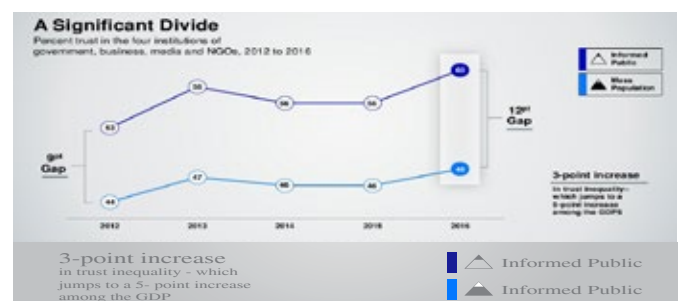
“As a strong believer in the power of insights-based communications, we are excited to introduce PPR in India. We have the heart of a start-up. We are entrepreneurial in our culture and passionate about our clients’ business. We are putting together a mix of integrated communication capabilities that can deliver the right stories, to the right people, in the right places, and at the right time,” said Vandana Sandhir.

## 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer : Gap Widening Between Informed And Mass Population | .....



The 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that globally the largest ever gap (12 points) now exists between informed and mass population. The gap is reportedly driven by income inequality and divergent expectations of the future. While trust levels among informed publics are the highest ever in 16 years, trust is below 50 per cent for the mass population in over 60 per cent of the countries surveyed, having barely moved since the Great Recession. The trust disparity has widened and is now at double digit levels in more than half of the countries surveyed. The U.S. presents the largest divide at nearly 20 points followed by the UK (17 points), France (16 points) and India (16 points).

India stands at the fourth position. US presents the largest trust divide, followed by the UK and France.



“We are now observing the inequality of trust around the world,” said Richard Edelman, President and CEO of Edelman. “This brings a number of potential consequences including the rise of populist politicians, the blocking of innovation and the onset of protectionism and nativism.”





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## After Germany Msl Rides On Uber India As Well | .....

**“MSL Group works for Uber in Germany as well. India assignment is being seen as an extension of the relationship.”**

MSL Group succeeded in winning Uber's India PR account.

With its recent expansions, the mobile ride-sharing company now offers services in 26 cities. MSL Group will take care of Uber's strategic communications and brand building efforts. In view of several incidents related to drivers of the company, MSL is expected to manage reputation and crisis issues as well.

Challenges for MSL with regards to Uber account are abundant. The company is facing regulatory issues, stiff resistance from traditional cab services and even government-run public transport services. Also, there is fierce competition from other players in the sector. Ola, Meru and even CarzOnRent are fighting aggressively to take on the global giant.

MSL Group works for Uber in Germany as well. India assignment is being seen as an extension of the relationship.

Another piece of news being seen in connection with Uber-MSL association is the appointment of Srinivas Krishnan, former editor of 'Business Standard Motoring', as senior advisor to 20:20 MSL's Auto practice. Srinivas comes from Porsche, where he was Head of Press for the India market. Krishnan will work closely with the auto practice across the offices of 20:20 MSL.



## Meenu Handa Appointed Google India Communications Head



Meenu Handa



Google India's communications team will now be led by Meenu Handa. Meenu until recently was heading Amazon India's corporate communications since 2013. Prior to that, she was with Microsoft.

Earlier, Google India's communications team was led by Paroma Roy Chowdhury who has now moved to SoftBank.

Meenu comes with an experience of more than two decades in the field of PR and communications. Her 10 years of corporate experience with two tech giants is preceded by a 15-year stint at IPAN Hill & Knowlton where she is credited of devising a proprietary PR measurement system and setting up of an independent news dissemination profit centre for IPAN.

## Barkha Dutt And Shekhar Gupta Launch The Print



Barkha Dutt



Shekhar Gupta



Well known senior journalists have joined hands to launch a digital media start-up - The Print. First offering by The Print was 'Off The Cuff' - a chat hosted by Shekhar Gupta himself. The first guest of the venture was SoftBank President and COO, Nikesh Arora.

Senior journalist, Ruhi Tewari, who has previously worked with The Indian Express and the financial portal Livemint, has joined as associate editor of The Print.

Senior journalist Y P Rajesh has been appointed as the executive editor of The Print. Announcement of the venture was first made on Twitter.



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# Hornet's Nest Stirred?

By - Lovejeet Alexander

All it took was one person to shift focus from Politicians to Political Communication Strategists. Some say he structured it and gave a definition to the sector while others are of the opinion that he has just redefined it. For some - he is an inspiration, for others - a challenge. Accept it gladly and offer a seat to him. Or don't. But he is here with a double bang and has spared none from feeling his presence. A rock has hit the calm waters and waves are pushing the shores. Let's explore the height and strength of the waves and analyse what all has been washed off, and what's more to go!

In an attempt to collect quotes, interviews and stories on the star political communication strategists of India, I am on the verge of claiming for a doctorate towards my one of its kind research. For now, the issue in your hand is no less than a PhD for me. Do I hear you asking for the findings? Well, they are as complex as the Indian political scenario itself.

Going through several stories and personal interactions, the first thing I noticed is that, in India, a Political Communicator is no more abbreviated as PC but as PK. The new age Chanakya, as he is called, has literally revolutionised the political communications scenario in India.

Prashant Kishor's appearance from nowhere and his journey so far has been discussed a lot. What I wanted to delve into are the intricacies of his job and work style, and track the trajectory. While nobody denies his grand entry and later ascension, the veteran communicators certainly question the sustenance.

## Elusive is the Word

Here is a man who has been in business for almost a decade now. His success rate, as it is till date, has been 100 percent. Demand for him has seen no dip ever since he took off. His rise is not willing to accept any height as a pinnacle. Well if all that isn't sufficient, what could be?

On top of it all, the man who has grown from being 'talk of the state' to 'talk of the nation' and whose demand is growing past the boundaries of the nation has always been elusive of media. That's his style and am sure he has a logic for that. As far as I could understand, all those in the same business try to be in the limelight, network more and build personal relationships. Well, that's how you get more business and also gain the efficiency of doing it better. But this man breaks all norms and

swims against the tide. And he can afford to do so as business lines up at his door, and so does the network.

## Trick of the Trade

The key to success in political communication, as they say, is – keep yours on the ground. It's difficult to fathom the connection between a helicopter strategist - who may be least aware of the local dynamics leave aside understanding the local language - and a grass root campaign. We know that the party worker is the best ear. But till the voices recorded by them are not collected well and churned proficiently by a team of specialised experts and conclusions are humbly accepted, nothing is gained. Campaigns drawn well, riding on the strengths, result in success. And repeat even.

I doubt if politicians learnt any lesson from the 2014 General Elections. And if they did, little wonder if they still remember them. But one lesson will surely remain fresh and sustain. Hire a technically sound professional to lead a war room full of communication professionals and people from IITs and IIMs. Don't question their ability and dare not try to understand what they are doing and why they are charging what they do. Well, at least Prashant Kishor has done that one good thing for all those claiming to be political communicators. Made their life easy, got them a good raise and opened avenues for many disenchanted political journalists and communicators. Professionals in the field owe him big time.

More of his know-how on winning elections and what influences Indian voters is soon to be published in the form of his debut book – The Election Game.



## Ambitions Unknown

As elusive is Prashant from media, so are his ambitions to the world. At this moment, it's difficult to understand what this man is upto. There are mixed views about his objective. His close associates think of him as someone who is not working for money at all and has no political ambitions as well. Colleagues consider him to be working with the sole aim of bringing good and accountable leaders to public offices.

Narendra Nath, a senior journalist who spent time with Prashant during Bihar elections is of the view that he is on track to set an entity in this nation that would offer one-stop solution for political campaigning and communication. That's on the lines of specialised consultancies as they exist in western countries.

If commercials and power are not things that are fuelling Prashant, then his zeal could only be attributed to retribution. It's a known fact that the relationship between Modi and Prashant went sour post 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Rumour has it that Amit Shah and Sangh parivar are to blame for it. Post that, Prashant has worked for and is expected to take assignments of other parties. Incidentally, all his campaigns will go on to hurt BJP.

## The Torch Bearer

For all those communicators and allied professionals who are in the business of political campaigning, Prashant has not just shown the way but has also opened the golden gates of opportunity. By far, there is just one Prashant Kishor in India and only one party would have him for each election. Others will certainly have to learn to survive and find the next best available. Soon enough there will be many Prashant Kishors available to choose from. Some may even grow to be better. But as of now, he's the first and the only man standing on the platform built by himself.

Whether Prashant Kishor will end up to be just a chapter in the Political Communications history of India or will he be writing a new history altogether is for time to tell.

“He is on track to set an entity in this nation that would offer one-stop solution for political campaigning and communication.”

But one thing is for sure - At this point in time of Indian politics, he has proven himself not once but twice. He isn't eyeing easy tasks that are waiting for him. Instead, he seems to be competing with none other than himself. His every next assignment is proving to be much more challenging than the earlier one. And he is emerging triumphant election after election.

Man of the moment, indeed! If he could do to governance what he has done to political campaigning and communication, this nation would probably be indebted to him as much as it is to Gandhi. Only time will tell.



Prashant Kishor



Ankit Lal

## With good people, come around the bad as well

Aam Aadmi Party is stated to be the result of the Anna movement. The movement became as big as we know of it because of social media, and later the electronic media. Ankit Lal is the man behind the impactful digital strategy for the movement and later for the party. Engineer by profession, Ankit took leave from his job to join the Anna movement. And now, he is the founding member of AAP, heading its IT and overseas communications wing. A tete-e-tete:

**Q. What inspired you to join politics and what is the force that keeps you motivated?**

Ans: People's confidence and their expectations made us take the battle forward. More than half my family is settled abroad. I could also have shifted and lived a comfortable life. But when I started taking this movement forward and calls from all corners of the world started pouring in appreciating my work, I got motivated to keep going.

**Q. What's your observation on the political scenario in India?**

Ans: In India, the political communications scenario is quite rudimentary as of now. We are still following what the West did in late 60s. Just that we are doing it with the use of photoshop and other new-age tools. A recent example is that of the posters of Bahubali inspired Jayalalitha during Chennai floods. Such ideas were picked in other countries in the 60s, when Political Communications was not as well-defined.

**Q. Don't you think that the entry of people like you and Prashant Kishor has brought along an evolution in Indian politics?**

Ans: Prashant is doing a nice job. But the problem is that he works as a political mercenary. Anybody can hire him, pay him, and get his job

done. Until you are in sync with the ideology of a certain organisation, you can't catch the pulse of your leader. That's lacking here.

**Q. There could be an external support system helping do a campaign and then there can be an in-house expert and his team that does the job for the party. What's the difference and what are the repercussions of the same?**

Ans: As someone hired externally, you get paid to do a job within a given timeline. This largely limits your scope of work. When someone from within the organisation does the same thing, it's more in sync and real. External professionals are hired in view of the work they have done but sometimes the association goes awry. This has a long term bearing on the party image. For example, Modiji hired Prashant Kishor. He did a certain kind of campaign. But now it is hurting because the party is unable to live by the high standards and expectations set by him before the masses.

**Q. Next big elections for AAP is in Punjab. Reports are that Prashant Kishor is to steer Congress' campaign there. Are you ready for it?**

Ans: The question is if he is ready for it? Any intelligent person who would go to Punjab will advise Prashant not to get into it. What we do is just an add on to what happens on ground. There can be only a 5 or 10% plus or minus perception change that we as communication professionals can effect. You can't totally turn around the ground reality.

**Q.** Do you see the role of communicators going beyond campaigning?

Ans: It has to move beyond campaigning and become part of the overall discourse eventually. A communicator playing a role in governance is an evolution and a major recognition for his work.

**Q.** What is that one thing which gives you an edge and that level of confidence?

Ans: What gives us an edge is the last one-year data that we have collected in the state. We are far ahead of them.

**Q.** What is the strongest point of Prashant Kishor?

Ans: Ground research. I very well know his brilliant team members who do that.

**Q.** Do you see more engineers like you and other professionals joining the political bandwagon in future?

Ans: Political advocacy will undoubtedly become much more prominent in India. But people like us will have to decide how to sustain without getting corrupted in the political scenario. In our party, we are all volunteers. Thankfully, my wife earns well as a media professional; that helps. Parties and politicians are certainly looking out for professional communicators. However, like with any business - with good people, the bad also come around. Those under talented are also trying to sell themselves.

“Prashant is doing a nice job. But the problem is that he works as a political mercenary.”

## IN THE LEAGUE



### FourthLion Technologies:

Naman Pugalia, Viral Shah, Shankar Maruwada

The trio helped Nandan Nilekani in his election campaign and now working for several candidates. Naman has also worked as a public policy and government affairs analyst at Google.



### Rann Neeti:

Rohit Deshpande, Antara Desai

The duo intends to professionalise politics, help those who wish to help others, and possibly blend both those objectives in the future. They believe that ‘winning hearts’ is the key to ‘winning elections.’



### Political Edge:

Gaurav Rathore, Saurabh Vyas

Buzzing name amongst young politicians. Helped design campaigns for several candidates in the recent Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and even Jammu & Kashmir assembly elections.



### Center for Empowerment Studies:

Sanjeev Singh

A Social Researcher cum Political Analyst, Sanjeev has worked in leading research firms in India and Sri Lanka. He is known for his expertise in the area of constituency mapping.



### thehive:

Sushil Pandit

A media campaign designer associated with BJP since 1998 when LK Advani first picked him. The only time when he wasn't part of the campaign planning was in 2004 - India Shining. And the NDA lost.



### Yukti Media:

Pramod Sawant

Worked for leaders like Milind Deora, Nilesh Rane and Shilpa Sarpotdar and several others from different parties. Positions himself as the best option for political campaigning in and around Maharashtra.



### PoltuBaaz:

Gaurav Singh

Company started by a group of IITians in 2012. Claim to provide best Election Management and Political Strategies Service with the help of party structure and resources to create win and win situation.



### YUVA Foundation:

Shantanu Gupta

A post graduate from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex (UK) in Governance and Development, Shantanu's experience of working with Centre for Civil Society and UNICEF adds much to his political consultancy.



## Creating Employee Friendly Work Environment And Talent Management | ....

The largest gathering of communications professionals for a conference in India was witnessed at PRAXIS 2015. The fourth edition of the only summit of its kind was held on 25th and 26th September in the city of Mysore and witnessed over 450 professionals from over 150 organisations in attendance. 35 speakers including three keynote speakers representing different continents were the highlights of the event this year. Theme for this year's edition was 'The Power to Create.'

One of the most interesting panel discussions at the event was on

the topic – What are the firms doing to create an employee friendly work environment and manage talent? The session was moderated by Chandramouli Nilakantan from Blue Lotus and the panel included top Asian leaders like Lynne Anne Davis, President – Asia Pacific, Fleishman Hillard, Jean-Michel Dumont, Chairman, Ruder Finn Asia, Paul Mottram, MD, Integrated Strategy – Asia Pacific, Text 100 and Angie Schneider, President - Asia Pacific, Porter Novelli.







“  
You don't know  
Sachin?  
”



“  
I am not a tourist,  
I am a traveller  
”



“  
I don't design clothes,  
I design dreams  
”



“  
My camera is my  
mind's save button  
”





11<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
**SALE**  
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“  
Holi kab hai, kab hai  
holi?  
”



“  
I take every risk,  
drop every fear  
”



“  
I hated Apple and  
Blackberry until they  
became gadgets  
”



“  
Happiness is...new  
guitar strings!”  
”



## Institutions Sustain; Personality Centred Structures Are Blips | .....



Dilip Cherian

Dilip Cherian - the prolific political analyst and co-founder of Perfect Relations - is widely referred to as India's 'Image Guru'. In a candid interview with Lovejeet Alexander, Cherian speaks his mind on the emergence of new age political communicators and their future.

**Q.** From the days when you started off to this day, political communications has come a long way. How do you see this journey? Is it just the tools and channels that have changed or there is much more than what meets the eye?

Ans: I would say that it's good to look at what has changed but it's equally important to see what has not changed. It is the extreme expectations of the electorate. What has changed is how political parties are seeking to address that. Most of the time we focus on the need of the client. In the last few years, we flipped it around and tried to tell parties to talk about what hasn't changed and how to address those issues. Nowadays, parties are making strategies that are more sharply focussed on need fulfilment.

**Q.** Do you mean that communications strategy has moved towards more realistic promises?

Ans: I think that the electoral victory is a triumph of selling hope over perceived reality that remains constant.

**Q.** What are the major shifts in communications strategy planning then and now? We've seen the focus of communications shuttling between personality centred to vision driven. What works the best and when?

Ans: The bigger shift is from issue based elections to leader based presidential type elections. We have seen that shift happens. Is that shift stable? My sense is - no, it's not. It's going to hover between one and

the other for some time till we figure out a bigger reform in our form of electoral choices. The difference is that when the regional parties are in play, it's personality driven all the way. When national parties are in play, they want a fig leaf of trying to create the sense that issues are more important than the people.

**Q.** Of late, we have witnessed uprising of new and specialised consultancies that claim to make or break governments. How do you see the trend? Why couldn't established firms grow to be that strong?

Ans: Part of the reason is that established companies in the PR business recognise that this business is once in five years or at the best once in three years. And you have too much of committed staff that has to have a regular day job. The second reason in my opinion is that the kind of agencies that are now finding traction in this business are those that are doing social sector PR for the government departments. And that's what the regular PR companies have ignored; that's a mistake they have made.

**Q.** A number of such professionals or consultancies aren't growing. The options for political parties and personalities are still very limited. Will the situation change anytime soon?

Ans: For the last 15 years of my career in public relations, I have been almost a sole voice saying that specialist companies are the future. And which is the reason why Perfect Relations has this bouquet of five different brands (standalone companies) under which we work.

The reason is that specialist companies are where you can invest in specialist skills which result in specialist media. And I think that pure political consultancies are those that focus on by-elections, state-wide municipal polls, state elections and national elections. If they can offer that entire thing under one umbrella, there is room for several consultancies in that space.

**Q. It is said that if the communications strategy fails the consultancy is to blame. But if it works well, the client gives no credit. Do you think that the recent case studies will help them change their mindset?**

Ans: Politicians are as guilty as entrepreneurs in the launch phase to blame somebody and keep the credit for themselves. I wouldn't put politicians as a separate category of clients. For us as a consultancy, we follow the philosophy that win or lose we remain below the radar - that's how we like to be. The recent case studies are not generic. Parties will continue to make the same mistake.

**Q. How is political communications different from advocacy and lobbying?**

Ans: Political communications is much more upfront. Both advocacy as well as lobbying are things that take time, and don't have a finite time horizon to be successful. They always have to be a mixture of above the radar and below the radar. In advocacy, you sell more by your conviction and knowledge than in political PR.

**Q. An incident that took place five years ago led to a large consultancy shutting down. Is this seen as a turning point for the community and people involved in political communications in India. What's your observation and what has been its effect overall?**

Ans: Whether it's the example of the recent victory or it's the demise of a consultancy, I think these are blips - structures which are not built as institutions but are built around individuals. If you don't have an institutional structure none of these structures are immune to huge bouts of self aggrandisement and annihilation. Either can happen. The lesson is that it's the skill of building an institution rather than building up an individual personality as the institution's face.

**Q. Many of the political communications professionals have shown interest in joining politics and many are already part of parties now. How do you see the trend and what's your take on it?**

Ans: People must make up their mind on what they are. A segway from one to the other can't happen overnight. Being a successful communicator is not a sufficient condition to being a successful politician. It is just one of the ingredients.

**Q. How was political communications as a career option back then when you started with and how's the scenario now?**

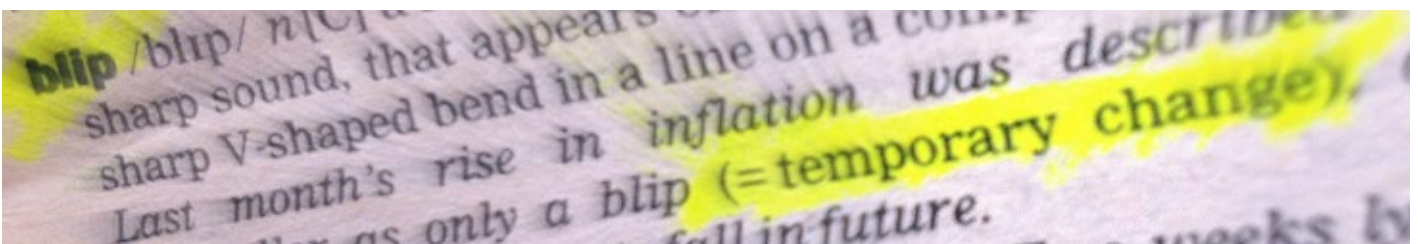
Ans: Political communications as a career is at best a tricky thing because there are few agencies who take people on a long term basis. There are few parties that have sustained communications budget post elections. And there are a few candidates with the appetite to actually use good advice as opposed to somebody implementing what they want done. The situation is improving enormously. In the next two elections we will see revolution of a political communications skill cadre.

**Q. Is it difficult nowadays to get manpower that understands political communications or has interest in the genre?**

Ans: There is skill shortfall in all of PR. And the biggest skills that there is a shortfall of is the comprehensive ability to understand data and to write it out in multiple formats. That skill is true whether you are in political consultancy, brand consultancy or technology consultancy. That is the biggest skill gap that exists and it exists because it cannot be taught post college.

**Q. What is the skill set required for someone to be a good political communications strategist? Any tips for those aspiring to make a career in this field?**

Ans: The key is one's ability to comprehend large quantities of material and convert them into communicable material at very short time frames. If you want to be the one, give up the dream of having weekends and of not living your work 24 x 7. During the period of a campaign, you don't have a life.





## Food As A Form Of Communication



**Nandini Goswami,**

Director, Corporate Communications  
Kellogg India

When we say 'communication' to a communication professional, the things that come to our mind are strategy, key messages, thought leadership, brand PR, presentations et al. Do we step back and think about the various other ways we can communicate besides the usual tools and vehicles? In the regular humdrum of meeting timelines, subtle things that can play a key role in story telling seem to skip our thoughts.

There are various other forms available to communicate – communication through food, culture, sports and music.

To read the complete article, please visit:

<http://reputationtoday.in/views/food-as-a-form-of-communication/>

## The PR Measurement Conundrum – Roi Or Roo!



**Sujit Patil,**

ABC - Vice President and Head - Corporate Communications, Godrej Industries Limited and Associate Companies

In most of the recent communication conferences that I attended, one common banter that I have heard taking precedence over all others, has been around the topic of PR measurement. Sometimes talked about loosely, sometime seriously, the questions I keep hearing are; how do we show value? How do we get a bang for the buck? How do we convince management to invest more on PR... so on and so forth? However, the fact remains, even after so much expert commentary by so called PR measurement gurus, it still remains an enigma for most of the PR practitioners.

To read the complete article, please visit:

<http://reputationtoday.in/views/the-pr-measurement-conundrum-roi-or-roo/>

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## Musings Of An Unknown Political Communicator | .....

As a communications professional who has had several opportunities to dabble into serious political and government communications since 2003, I have seen the evolution of this field from an individual to an organisational level, just like the world has witnessed the emergence of multimodal supermarkets giving a tough competition to friendly neighbourhood kirana shops.

Earlier, it was limited to having a coterie of people around a political leader advising him or her on his public and media appearance, armed with whatever little information or access to knowledge they had basis their experience and expertise. At the party level as well, it was left to some savvy media managers to manage communications. It was not a very complex world to live and thrive in. And, of course, it was also not as sexy or glamorous as it sounds today. Especially, after one such new age communicator specialising in political communications became part of a certain state's cabinet, many of my friends, who worked with me, chided me for not being consistent and focussed in this field.

But mind you my dear friends, it's not at all sexy! It is a tough job and not a single person's job. You have to be the one who must wear a watch, but not to look at the time, but to keep a track on finish-lines and appointments. It's a mentally and physically challenging job for you and demands utmost commitment from you and your family and friends. It's not about sitting in war rooms created in backyards of luxurious bungalows of Lutyens' Delhi or lush state capitals. It is about hitting the dirt track at the first instance. It is about sipping cutting tea in village dhabas and sharing meals with people in their huts. The real India lives in villages. A good political communicator must be aware of his or her surroundings and should have the ability to discover the music from all surrounding noise. S/he must have a keen eye for making sense of big data for big results along with enough gut feeling to stir the human emotions. Now, if you don't have both - it's perfectly alright - nobody said that you have to be alone in this - you can always have trusted partners to do that for you. The qualities you need is one of a collaborator, a leader, a team player, someone who is a keen student of psychology and human behaviour, and has lots of patience.

There are many famous political communicators and then there are many underdogs, who like to remain behind the curtains and continue to make their clients look great. It is my strong belief that the day you stop shaping the news and become the news is the day when you need to relook at what you are doing and evaluate your choices. The more connected you are at the grassroots, higher are the chances of your success. Communicators out there are working day and night to help politicians to remain in touch with the public. Technology is changing the way the entire process used to work. However, it hasn't changed the need to connect with real people with real issues. And that's where the success lies. Delhi and Bihar elections are such examples where many pundits failed to gauge the mood of the public by solely relying on hi-tech gizmos and larger than life communication campaigns. I predicted a win for Nitish Kumar in August 2014 over a dinner with a friend. He didn't believe me then but called soon after the results were out. He was



Tushar Panchal

happy that I was right but little sad because he was wrong! After all, what are friends for!

A lot has been said and written about recent elections campaigns. All I am watching now is the preparation many major political parties are doing for the upcoming elections, and observing the techniques and technology being deployed for US Presidential elections. I would be happy to share what worked and what didn't once these are over. Till then, enjoy life. Be a good citizen and vote for a better tomorrow.

Tushar Panchal comes with extensive experience in public affairs, government affairs and marketing communications and currently leads strategic communications and public affairs practice at Adfactors.



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### Politicians As Thought Leaders, **Constituents As Consumers** | .....



Prema Sagar

**“In the ’80s, when the primary form of communication was print and state-controlled television and radio, political communication was less complicated and less intensive.”**

**Prema Sagar is the Founder President of Public Relations Consultants Association of India (PRCAI). She is Vice Chairman, Burson-Marsteller, Asia Pacific & Principal Founder, Genesis Burson-Marsteller.**

Political communications has evolved significantly over the last couple of years. There is a higher degree of research and strategic thinking behind political campaigns of today than there was just a few years ago. Parties and individuals are cognizant of the impact the right messaging and integration can have on their political goals and objectives. More and more, they are looking at the constituents the way marketers look at

consumers—using the principles of marketing and engaging marketing experts.

In the ’80s, when the primary form of communication was print and state-controlled television and radio, political communications was less complicated and less intensive. India of the ’90s marked the entry of private news and even though it meant more outlets for political communications, it also meant more checks and barriers for political messaging. In the 21st century India, where besides television, radio and print, there is digital, social and mobile, the turf of political communications has expanded and become more layered. Social networking sites such as facebook and twitter have allowed consumers/voters to voice their views and engage directly with the political class. The BM Twiplomacy and World Leaders on facebook studies show how effective global leaders are on social platforms.

Political communications today is integrated and segmented at the same time. While it is one message you drive across platforms and mediums, the varied nature of your audiences (even if we were to go by the simplistic classification of urban versus rural) necessitates that you customise your message and chose the right platform. For instance, Prime Minister Modi has revived All India Radio and is using it effectively and his social media communication is different from that on air.

### Consultancies Need To Invest In The Vertical, **Hire Specialists** | .....



Nitin Mantri

The General election of 2014 can well be called a watershed year in Indian politics. Narendra Modi set a new trend when he boosted his image, and that of Gujarat, through an international communications consultant. Everyone suddenly realised there is immense potential in a PR-styled political campaign. Prashant Kishor, the man who engineered the victory of Modi at the Centre and Lalu-Nitish in Bihar,

became the poster boy of communication wizardry. Soon, everyone wanted a piece of him. Kishor was apparently approached by at least four States who are gearing for assembly elections, but the former United National health official is playing it cool.

**Nitin Mantri is the President of Public Relations Consultants Association of India (PRCAI). He is also the CEO and Business Partner, Avian Media.**

With voters becoming more politically aware of their candidates, and the policy initiatives being taken at all levels, also given the prolific growth of social media, political parties have realised that future

elections will demand more accountability. They have also realised that with the growing number of young voters, image will make a huge difference when it comes to winning an election.

Hence, whether it is Kishor or some other communication consultant, almost all leading political parties are looking for campaign strategists. Public Relations consultancies are also not immune to this new wave; but they have to realise that the arena of political strategy is different from the world of business. Consultancies in Delhi and Mumbai will have to pull up their socks and look beyond general elections. Today, State and civic polls are important indicators of what lies in store on a national stage. The action takes place at the grassroots.

Consultancies need to invest in a separate vertical of political PR and hire specialists, who are aware of the needs of each State and its voters. West Bengal is going to polls soon, and its chief minister Mamata Banerjee's requirements will not be the same as Lalu-Nitish. The one size-fits-all formula does not work in political communications. We need experts, who know the ground realities of a State, who have done their research and understand the pulse of voters. Basically, it has to be a mix of formal training and hands-on experience. Only then can consultancies customise strategies to suit local needs.

All said and done, political communications is here to stay, and the opportunities will grow, and, so will the challenges. But, I am confident that PR consultancies will play an important role in this scenario.





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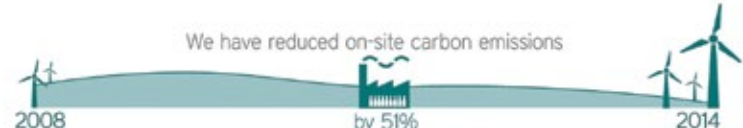


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# Articulation Is A Natural Talent Unless One Spends Years To Master It | .....



Nupur Sharma – the BJP spokesperson - is well known for her ability to take head-on debates with leaders from opposition who many a times come with an experience more than her age. But that's no deterrent. Lovejeet Alexander, in a rendezvous with Nupur, tries to find the nuances of her job and tips for aspirants.

**Q.** How easy or difficult is your job as a representative of the party in opposition in the State but in power in Lok Sabha? Do you have a say in deciding the line of communication that the party picks or is it just a decision conveyed that you are expected to follow and find your own words to defend?

Ans: When you are in a UT like Delhi, the pressure is more because you are expected to communicate and explain to the electorate the legalities and the power-dynamic difference constitutionally between a full-fledged state and a UT. It also helps when the local government lacks in services wherein the central can be shown as the more caring and well-meaning government through its policies i.e., the party in opposition in state is the party that cares more. As for the line, we all pitch in with our respective suggestions. But, quite honestly, in Delhi it's as simple as following and defending the law of the land – which, as is apparent, the Delhi Government is adamant on disobeying in all respects.

**Q.** You've been a spokesperson of BJP for quite some time now. How has the experience been and do you think anything including party's communications strategy has changed after coming to power at the centre?

Ans: I am actually the Media co-convenor both for Delhi State BJP and BJYM, but double as a media panelist as and when the party requires. Being a lawyer helps in arguing and being articulate on television. But honestly, sometimes the unnecessary fighting during debates - which you have got to do if you want your point to be heard, can be quite draining. Well, quite a few of our star spokespersons are either elected or are in the cabinet today, and are thus busy with constituencies and work. The immediate challenge was to fill the void, but luckily there is no dearth of talent in the party. Also, unlike earlier, now we also have to keep the government welfare schemes in mind while participating in discussions – the responsibility of spokespersons is definitely more than pre-2014 Lok Sabha elections.

**Q.** Have you ever faced a situation where your personal views on a particular issue clash with that of the party line? How do you handle such a situation?

Ans: Well, I am in the party because my views match with the party-line – it is quite simple as that! But I do choose the debates that I go for. For example, the MSM today wants to involve the government or political party where neither are required to have a stand. So, personally speaking, I instinctively know where the party will take a stand and where not and what the stand will be, if there is one. That helps.

**Q.** There must have been incidents when you would have got irritated with news anchors on live television shows. How do you deal with them?

Ans: Since anchors and moderators do call the shots, it's kind of difficult if their bias is apparent through the show but I am hardly one to back-down. So I make it a point to be heard in case my voice is being scuttled or when I am clearly given lesser time than the anchor's chosen spokespersons.

**Q.** Does being a woman get you to enjoy some benefits and have an edge over others or it's the other way round?

Ans: Neither. Being an educated woman helps as it also means I can work in off-the-field, intellectual activities of the party. But work is work in a set-up as democratic as our party which promotes both genders equally and fairly. Thankfully, BJP's culture is super disciplined and very respectful towards its women workers and the party ensures that we don't have to face unnecessary troubles only on account of being women.

**Q. Would you like to share some tips or a piece of advice with the women who aspire to be a political communications professional or join mainstream politics? What is your opinion about it and that one piece of advice that you would like to share with your counterparts in opposition?**

Ans: My advice is – in politics, work and a serious attitude towards it is the only mantra which works. Be loyal to your party, and be flexible and adjusting to mix with all sorts of people. Be ready to travel far and wide, rural and urban, to truly understand India. Believe in the ideology you are working for and keep at it.

Most importantly, you must naturally have a sense of service to help people to be good at your job and nothing shall come in the way. Fame and success will follow, as I truly believe that if it's the other way round, it is probably going to be short-lived.

**Q. It's a common view that central government needs to involve more brains to produce better and early results. You are one of the names that's surely to be considered for governance when time comes. If given an option what would you choose communication or governance? Why?**

Ans: Actually, some of the best brains are working for the government already so I seriously don't know who these people making these opinions about the central government are. As for your second question, everything has a time and place. And the more time one spends doing something the more likely is she/he to attain perfection through experience. My job is to serve the country and party to the best of my abilities and since my seniors in the party have way more experience and understanding of the field, I leave all these decisions to them. It is communications for now and perhaps when they feel that I am ready for it and the time is right, the job will switch to governance.

**Q. At times it's apparent that the party's communications strategy is being guided by third-party influencers and supporting organisations. Bihar elections is one recent example. What best can you do in such a scenario?**

Ans: Everybody gets involved in electioneering – be it behind the scene war-rooms or party leaders and workers – with an intention to win an election. But it's politics and in electoral battles you win some and you lose some. All parties have to introspect from the experience, which (mind you) happens even if you have won an election. However, as an individual part of a large collective, if I personally sense something amiss, I simply communicate it to my seniors and discuss possible course-correction or trouble-shooting techniques. Or, if I have the power and wherewithal to handle it at my level I do it myself.

**Q. Delhi and Central governments have a love hate relationship. How do you see this going forward and do you think it's tarnishing BJP's image and are spokespersons having a hard time to defend?**

Ans: Actually it's an all-hate relationship being meted out from the state to the centre. I honestly believe that the AAP Delhi government and

its convenor (the Chief Minister) haven't been able to come to terms with the 2014 Lok Sabha loss – the language used against the PM of the country is enough proof of one's intentions and feelings of hatred. On the contrary, all this tamasha is reflecting rather poorly on the Delhi government, since all the principles and tall claims used by them to come to power in Delhi are exactly what they seem to be defying and fighting against today. Be it their support for corruption, corrupt officers and netas within AAP, VVIP racism or non-delivery of ALL the tall promises, doles and subsidies as mentioned in their 2015 manifesto.

**Q. Do you see there is a need of structured talent hunt and grooming for the next line of spokespersons? Is there any plan of doing so within the party cadre?**

Ans: Articulation, I feel, is a natural talent unless one spends years to master it. I am sure the party leadership is already at it and as I mentioned earlier, there are workers like me who are advised to participate as and when it deems fit or necessary to communicate the party's line. And then assessments happen amongst the large talent pool. Let me simply tell you that nothing misses the leadership's eyes – more than we think we know they are all clued in.



Nupur Sharma

Who is more important to win an election? Is it the Political Communications Strategist or the Political Leader who hires the services of the best professionals available, rests full faith in them, and acts well on the script provided? We threw the question on two young Political Communications Strategists and got some very interesting perspectives. Read on.

### Leaders are born but not necessarily all leaders are born with good communication skills.

From Gandhi to Churchill; Martin Luther King to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, history is full of individuals who, through their words and deeds, have shifted public opinion and behaviour. In the recent past, Indira Gandhi, Barrack Obama and Narendra Modi have all been hailed as great political communicators. All leaders know that great communicators can influence change but they also know that only great communications don't win elections. They know that most voters do not experience political leaders first hand but rely on 'heard voices' to frame an image of their leaders. With this belief, strong leaders build a strong team, by placing right people at right places, to help them with communications strategy and implementation, and create a direct link between them and voters.

With the emergence of news hungry 24X7 channels fuelled by social media, political campaigns now need strategy to be evolved on a real time basis turning any situation into a huge positive opportunity that completely changes the game over a weekend or even overnight.

Over the past few years, there is a big change in public interest as the voters are now concerned about and are asking questions regarding policy initiatives at all levels, besides the candidate's credibility and the party ideology.

Today, the WIN is a collaboration of efforts from all quarters but the political leader, his or her work and legacy is the key. The leader is the face. The face that inspires confidence in the voters and the strategist plays a backroom role in marketing the face.

Success depends on the marketability of this face based on work done in the past or the potential for the future.



Anup Sharma

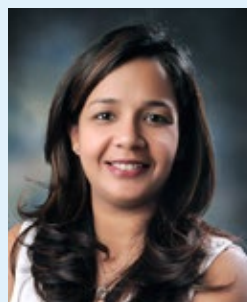
Anup Sharma, an independent PR & Communications consultant, has worked with three Chief Ministers and two Union Ministers in the last National elections and three assembly elections managing the key messaging and social media tools.

### In today's world no election can be won sans a Political Communication Strategist

Today, public opinions about individuals, incidents, places and issues are shaped by various forms of communication that bombard us from every direction and myriad sources. From the traditional print and electronic media to the modern social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and YouTube, communication has a profound effect on what and how we think. What we see, hear and read, could be the difference between Kanhaiya Kumar getting public support for his right to free speech and him being declared a country enemy for sedition. Similarly, the right communication, in the right medium at the right time could be the difference in the electoral mandate for a political leader.

What issues does a candidate or political leader associate himself with to strike a chord with the electorate? How and what does he communicate? Which words does he use and what emotions does he portray? What mediums are used for this communication? political communication strategists help find answers to many such questions. They ensure the correct message reach the correct media and are sent out at the correct time though the correct medium.

In today's media frenzy environment, communications and in turn communications strategists are indispensable to winning an election. Politicians could win elections in the absence of social media and multimedia channels which was how it was back in the day. We have seen in Barack Obama's campaign in 2008 and 2012. We have seen in Narendra Modi's campaign in 2012 and both Assembly elections campaigns in Delhi and Bihar in 2015 that elections are won with a grand behind the scenes play by political communications strategists. They are here to stay and help a face win.



Anubhuti Mathur

Anubhuti Mathur has over 10 years of industry experience, working for companies like IBM and Aptara. She holds an Economics degree from Fergusson College and a post graduate diploma in Mass Communication from Symbiosis, Pune.





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## Moving To A New Age Of Political Communications | .....



Alok Sanwal

Alok Sanwal - the COO of Jagran Prakashan Ltd. and Editor of i-next, a bi-lingual daily – is one of those few professionals who dared to swim against the tide and made a shift from marketing to editorial. In a frank conversation with Lovejeet Alexander, Alok elaborated on the value addition by the new age communicators and the changing trends in political class' media relations.

**Q.** You have seamlessly sailed from branding to editorial, and now lead a popular and successful publication. How was the experience of playing two different roles?

Ans: I believe that branding and editorial both are all about communications. One is about mass communications and the other is marketing communications. Both are based on the same fundamental communications school practices. Just that the audiences change. One is aimed at achieving something while the other is aimed at mass with news at its core. When you head marketing communications, you have to run a business model and I suppose that editors today also have to keep in mind that there is an input output equation. Objectives are well defined for both. The delightful part of being on the editorial side is that it comes with an opportunity for social connectivity and meaningful contribution to the society.

**Q.** Your brainchild i-next was an experiment that broke all norms. It was a bi-lingual tabloid from Jagran's stable. Now, it's a broadsheet. What led to such experiments and how has the experience been?

Ans: When we started 10 years ago, the vision was to be what our TG is. Our TG is bi-lingual; they continue and keep talking in a mixed lingo. We picked the same common used language and quintessentially have remained like that. Our bi-lingual format has defined our identity. Incidentally, we still are a slim broadsheet and not a regular broadsheet. It's part of the progression that is based on research which says that broader format has a greater acceptance and helps us in making a better connect with our reader.

**Q.** Your editions cover several states. Many of them recently witnessed assembly elections. Have you observed any difference in political communications between recent and earlier elections?

Ans: There is a clear shift in terms of political communications which I would like to call a progression. Use of technology into the scheme of things has been way more than ever in the recent elections. The new age communications strategists are leading political campaigns from the front and are leaving no part of the society untouched. What statement is to be made, who is it aimed at, how to respond to it and what needs to be communicated first, what later, it's all dependent on the new age strategists.

**“Media will be always selective for its own larger interest which is either to provide relevant information to its readers or to ensure that it stays relevant to its audience.”**

**Q.** What do the new age political communicators bring along to add to the political scenario and electoral system of India?

Ans: They clearly give a method to the practice and structure the mechanism which may otherwise be haywire, considering the enormity of the communication on multiple media. New age political communicators understand that every communication of the political parties needs to go to several sets of people simultaneously at multiple layers. And these are not conventional communications going through conventional media.

**Q. Do you see any difference between the communications strategy of regional and national political parties?**

Ans: National parties have to contest across the length and breadth of the nation so they have to be careful in picking up the issues and agenda and have to distinguish between the communication that is to go national and the one that is to go very local. A comment that is relevant in one part of the country may not be conducive for the party in another part of the nation. They have to differentiate between the two and to make sure what is communicated locally and what goes out nationally. While a regional party does not have that big a challenge.

**Q. Media complains that governments are replacing press conferences with tweet conferences nowadays. Interaction of the present PM with the journalists at the best is for an annual selfie session. What's your take on this?**

Ans: There should be warmth between the government and media in general and there should be a definite level of keeping media in confidence and vice versa. That diplomacy is being handled in a slightly different and evolved manner now. I think that the earlier government was selective in keeping the editorial heads of key media houses happy and following a heavy PR strategy which this government probably is not following. It is not into bracketing policy. Uniformity of communication reaching to everyone is what the larger chunk of media is happy with.

**Q. It has often been observed that the communications strategy and sometimes even the messaging of political parties changes completely after they come in power. How do you see the same?**

Ans: In message, I suppose there is a broader level of consistency but there is a course correction. Once in power, one is consistently making his communication appropriate, relevant and probably working on to highlight the strengths.

**Q. Whenever a communications plan, especially that of the government fails, the party and supporters start blaming media. Do you think that the communications strategists should learn to accept failure?**

Ans: The communications strategy irrespective of whether that is for a product, a party, an individual or brands, if it is aimed for certain objectives, the strategist should always take into account the external factors and how people are going to react to them. Why blame media? Ultimately media will always be selective for its own larger interest which is either to provide relevant information to its readers or to ensure that it stays relevant to its audience.

**Q. Sometimes we see two or more power centres within a party. Many a times their messaging is poles apart. Could there be a strategy that can take care of such situations?**

Ans: Firstly, the party which has a clearer core, ideology and communication within the cadre and party line and clear perspective on multiple issues will not face any such issue. Though there may be several power centres within the party.

Secondly, there should be an internal process of clearly briefing the spokespersons along with the dictum and decorum that nobody will speak out of turn. If there is an issue then rather than specifically reacting to an incident and giving a verdict, the leaders should stick to the larger perspective and ideology of the party. Broader decorum is an absolute issue of internal communication which needs to be consistent and everybody needs to abide by that.

**Q. What is that one piece of advice that you have for political parties with regards to their media relations?**

Ans: Both formal and informal channels should be opened up. In the current day media, there may be a lot of journalists specially the people worth their credentials who may not necessarily want to reach out to political parties. Hence, parties will have to open formal and informal channels at both the levels.



## Indian General Elections 2014: A Case Study | .....



Hemant Gaule

Hemant Gaule is the co-founder and Deputy Dean of India's first independent school of public relations. Prior to this, he was a part of a team that spearheaded the Prime Minister's national election campaign. After graduating from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, he spent two years with a leading Indian conglomerate in brand management and corporate communications.

The 2014 General Election of India was unarguably one of the most talked about and studied elections of our generation. An evolved landscape of voter demographics, ideologies and communications ecosystem resulted in some path breaking campaigns as its parts. It was clear that the campaign styles, strategies and tactics would need to be different, owing to the complexity of this landscape.

Historically, some elements of election campaigns in India have remained consistent. Besides immense diversity of dialects and demographics, caste, religion and alliances have been the conventional arenas of political battles. Issues at the national and regional levels become topics of discourse that work alongside these factors. Finally, and to a certain extent, political ideologies influence allegiances of the voting populace. While these would continue to play an undeniable role in decisive victories, every new election era sees influence of a new set of factors.

According to Election Commission of India, 814.5 million Indians were eligible to vote in 2014. In the overwhelming 65% population of India aged 35 or younger, over 150 million were first time voters in this election (and a little over 23 million of them were aged 18-19 years). Although this did not undermine the influence of the conventional factors, it brought its own dynamism to the elections, something that campaign strategists could not ignore. Never before had such a large group of people added to the voting bank, with next to no insight on which side they would support.

As far as the issues go, our economy would be a larger focus as perceived by this demography. As election campaigns flow, issues play two roles. The incumbent government must justify their performance, while the contending parties use them to destabilise their claims to re-election. Closer to the elections the role transcends, where the contenders must present their vision and capabilities to deliver policies that result in the nation's prosperity.

By 2013, it was apparent that the UPA government had little to substantiate their performance in power. According to data from PRS Legislative Research, the 15th Lok Sabha was the least productive in history. The PMO seemed to have been holding the dog collar of the Coalgate scandal, amongst others. In the lighter sections of public discourse, an A to Z guide to INC's corruption was being tossed around, identifying several scandals under their government against each letter of the alphabet. Failing checks on unemployment and faltering

economic health of the country were attributed to the government as their failure. This was enough to ascertain their destabilisation as legitimate contenders and set the stage for the necessity of a change in government.

NDA, on the other hand, cemented their claim to a strong government under the leadership of Narendra Modi. LK Advani right after his initial surprise and protest to his nomination came out with his supportive affirmation that: "If elected, Modi will repeat the work that we have done in BJP-ruled states across the country".

The second major element that campaign strategists had to harness was communications in the digital age. An ocean of information was easily available, rapidly consumed and discussed in online forums. This was the only mechanism through which campaign managers could now identify, segregate and leverage their supporter groups in this otherwise unknown first time voter base. Data on their consumption patterns, location and issues that resonated with them was gold, and was proactively gathered through several engagement initiatives.

Digital media empowered those supporters to contribute to the elections, who would otherwise have limited means to do so. Aam Aadmi Party, while building a multilevel influencer base, relied on simple (and free) tools such as Google Spreadsheets to allocate duties across a geographically dispersed supporter base. From a central location, volunteers would receive direction and information through Google Hangouts. Citizens for Accountable Governance, a political think tank working with Prashant Kishor created 315 Facebook pages, one for each "swing" constituency of BJP, to gather and disseminate information. This would later set the foundation for Chai Pe Charcha, as it provided the necessary operational and political intelligence. By and large, by keeping a close eye on online conversations, campaign managers were able to segregate issues with incredible detail and accuracy, effectively speaking to individuals the very tone that would influence them.

Such ingenuity and innovation that sprang from the grassroots, and proceeded to go all the way, this is one of the biggest insights that communicators can take away. There are elements to electioneering in India that have persisted, and there are those that have originated specifically for an upcoming election. Successful political communicators will be able to identify and harness these new elements, whilst combining them with conventional factors of Indian elections.



## Await Everyone At The Drawing Board | .....



Shubesh Ravindran

### Internal Communications and Employee Engagement

Shubesh heads the creative division at BLAQ, a communications firm that specialises in Internal Communications, Brand and Employee Engagement. He started his career as an analyst and took the plunge about seven years ago to pursue his passion for art and technology.

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Hearty congratulations to the fraternity for its first-ever magazine. It is, indeed, a matter of pride and joy to write for its inaugural edition.

Reputation, as the very word, is of immense importance today. At its very surface, it is indicative of success/failure, vision, growth, progress, et al. Deep down, it is clearly an indication of the role that an entity intends to play in this world, which requires great clarity, strong value system, consistent evaluation of the action and the path, and an ever evolving vision.

It is still easy to think about reputation when we talk about it in the context of individuals. They have the wherewithal to understand and build theirs according to their own vision and values, not through someone else's belief systems and ideas.

The idea of reputation, however, becomes complex when we talk about an organisation that has so many individuals, with each one affecting the reputation of the organisation with his/her conduct, performance, ideas and self-belief. Imagine employees having different values, ethical preferences, priorities, goals and differing convictions, deciding on or directly affecting values, clarity, vision, conduct and delivery of an entity. How do you visualise it?

### Is the answer - Chaos

Add to it the distrust brewing amongst employees and employers, the heightened expectations from leadership, increasing corporate frauds and scams, leadership vacuum, the increasing layoffs in contrast to an employee's expectation of year on year growth, the societal pressure on everyone to earn more and consume more, employee retention challenges in companies, and to top it all, the poor communication skills widespread amongst Indian work force.

At the heart of such complexity lies the very idea of Internal Communications and Employee Engagement. It is to make sure that in times of such confusion and uncertainty, this 'chaos' is at least well managed - if not reduced greatly.

That is why, I believe, Internal Communications and Employee Engagement is more important than ever and impacts Reputation so deeply.

This brings me to a greater concern - understanding or misunderstanding this function. Until recently, Internal Communications and Employee Engagement was defined in terms of newsletters, annual parties, posters, etc. Unfortunately, it is still being defined in the same manner

in many companies.

Communication between teams, amongst colleagues, across hierarchies and leadership that make delivery and implementation of strategies a reality, is the most ignored aspect in many companies. That is the reason why internal channels like intranet, newsletters and posters are becoming redundant and losing credibility. The channels are losing relevance as they serve outdated or safe information in the name of a newsletter and parties, in the name of interactivity and engagement. I don't say that the information based newsletters and parties based engagement is not important, but it is peripheral.

A not-so-great relationship between a line manager and his subordinate will make the best of the strategies fail. How a line manager gives feedback, clarity among employees on how their roles connect with the bigger picture, and regular water cooler conversations, among many other things, form an important part of information flow in an organisation. These and many other questions need to be answered and effectively communicated to employees across levels for creating a more efficient work environment. If the core questions and concerns are answered from time to time, the employee will fund his own party with his colleagues and will be far more engaged at work.

Unfortunately, in the world of tremendous noise, reputation is still considered a subject of external factors.

If we want to utilise communication to the best of its potential, the internal communications managers and heads will have to redefine the scope, and put forward a case amongst the leadership team for wider acceptance and greater attention around the same. Almost every company will term people as its assets but they hardly allocate a decent budget for Internal Communications and Employee Engagement. The business models are changing, the business environment is changing, and, with them, the way companies need to engage with employees should also change.

If not, then grapevine and internal politics will become more and more prominent and conclusive within organisations, only to make talent retention, meritocracy and sustained growth a bigger challenge.

As I highlight the challenges, I am equally involved with many companies in working out possible ways of addressing these issues on a daily basis. It will be a pleasure to continue this discussion in the next edition. In the meanwhile, I invite our readers to share their views on the thoughts presented.

After all, we are in it together.

# Political Communications Is Here To Stay, And So Is Reputation Today | .....

It is exciting to be making history. It is even more exciting when history is being made for a passion. What you have in your hands is arguably India's first print magazine for the strategic communications professional. Reputation Today is a labour of love for the communications fraternity. Ever since the first edition of PRAXIS, a dream of bringing out a magazine has been nurtured. It took time to find collaborators who would help bring this idea to life.

We hope a new breed of young professionals emerges to emulate what is being done in the west by those in their 20s and 30s to create outstanding election campaigns. Perceptions built around reputations are those that last longest.

Every quarter, we will focus on a specific topic of interest and close to half the content will revolve around it. The flavour of the season is Political Communications. We have a Prime Minister who has made communications his style statement. We have a political communications strategist who was not heard of beyond a tiny circle at this time two years ago. Today, he features on the cover of a magazine. We chose Prashant Kishor to feature on the cover because there has been no other individual in recent times who has been credited for two successful election campaigns in a span of 18 months. Only time will tell how this method of oscillating between ideologies will shape up. But, the verdict is out. Political communications and external election strategists will be in demand in the months and years ahead.

It is important to keep in mind that a lot of us tend to confuse a public affairs professional with a political communications strategist. While the former will look at ways to influence policy in favour of the client or employer, a political communications strategist will work for a political party or politician to help reach voters using various tactics in order to get an individual or party elected or re-elected. Specialised consultancies that plan and execute these campaigns have emerged. Thanks to technology, several campaigns are being driven through smart use of data analytics and customised apps.

I'm confident that over the next five years, every politician worth his or her name will come to depend heavily on these strategists and specialised firms to run campaigns, manage constituencies, and create a potent mix of content and communications in the day to day operation of the office. We hope a new breed of young professionals emerges to emulate what is being done in the west by those in their 20s and 30s to create outstanding election campaigns. Perceptions built around reputations are those that last longest.

We are here to stay, both as a magazine and as an online portal. The online portal will be unique as it will be the first Made in India portal exclusively focusing on the consultancy-based and in-house public relations professional. The key differentiator will be the weekly columns by regular contributors and guest writers. We also have editorial team members based in various continents who will share their inputs from time to time.

We look forward to several of you raising your hand to write for the portal. Your inputs over email will be greatly appreciated. Let us know what you would like the focus of our subsequent issues to be.

Send your thoughts to  
[amith@promisefoundation.com](mailto:amith@promisefoundation.com)



Amith Prabhu

Amith Prabhu takes pride in calling himself a Public Reputation Professional. With nearly 15 years of work experience, Prabhu is currently a semi-entrepreneur, a passionate fundraiser and a PR educator.

He is the Founding Dean of the Indian School of COMMunicators & REputation (SCoRe), India's first independent school of Public Relations. He is also the

Founder of The PRomise Foundation, the only organisation from India which is a member of the Global Alliance and which organises the largest annual communications conference in South Asia.

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