

Public Relations: old order yielding way to new

The public relations industry in india is rethinking strategy and messaging in the diverse ways

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An IMF working paper released in January 2006 and titled *India's Pattern of Development: What Happened, What Follows?* noted unusual behaviour in some Indian states. Certain fast growing Indian states, the researchers stated, had "started behaving like industrial countries" at nearly a quarter or one-fifth of their income levels. Statistical tables revealed that manufacturing in these states, which should normally start declining at about USD 14,700 per capita, had started declining in Karnataka at a per capita income of USD 2700 and Maharashtra at USD 3400. Instead of reverting to a more traditional pattern of specialisation in labour-intensive industries, these states, the paper noted, have skipped directly to specialisation in skill intensive industries or to services where they appear to have a comparative advantage.

This is not an overnight phenomenon. We know that India and China's GDP growth has been twice the global rate in past 20 years. Based on these trends, *according to* Morgan Stanley, in a decade India's economy (in PPP terms) should be bigger than Japan. A quick look at the foreign capital inflow into India over the recent past reflects foreign capital inflow has grown more than three-fold in just over five years and foreign direct investment has more than doubled.

Together, these changes have spelt a sea change for the business environment in India – a change that we wake up to each day.

Prominent among the changing trends in market dynamics in India are:

- **The flattening of the Indian landscape:**
Looking at the Indian market historically, we can clearly see that the landscape is getting flatter. With steady growth and a filtering down of development, the middle class in India is getting bigger and bigger – with a distinct reduction in the peaks and troughs. A parallel trend is the demolition of traditional turfs in business. This includes the official dismantling of public sector turfs like the airline or telecommunication industry. They also include the unofficial flattening of business monarchies.
- **Redefining the age of leadership**
Looking around you - CEO's are getting younger. Experience and wisdom is not synonymous with grey hair anymore. And these leaders play the game differently.
- **The influx of global players**
This perhaps is the biggest difference that we have witnessed in the past decade. Global players entering our market gingerly at first are now gung ho about the experience. They are enthusiastically expanding operations to get fully entrenched in the Indian economic landscape.
- **The role of technology**
The technological advancements in the Indian corporate world in the recent past have transformed the way we work. 24X7 connectivity, mobile internet are fast becoming the rule rather than the exception.
- **The role of the new media**
This is one area where we are perhaps still playing catch up. We are still finding our feet in blogging, viral marketing, or podcasting. Yet, before we think we are the only ones struggling to find our virtual feet, it might be cold comfort to know that so are most global CEOs.

So how do these changes impact the Public relations industry in India? To begin with, we are quickly unlearning the way PR was done in the past. We think strategy and messaging rather than tactics and pitching. The expectation from public relations today is to play the role of advisors not publicists.



There is no undermining the role played by the traditional media, but depending on the target audience, we would be running the risk of blotting out a complete section if we ignore new media. Public Relations in India is breaking through the strait jackets of the press release and the press conference. Yes, many of us are thinking viral marketing, mobile marketing, cyber activism... In order to accurately represent India on the run, we as a profession began to absorb global best practices in public relations as fast as possible and then customized these to our unique conditions. We embraced audits to benchmark our consultancy standards and began offering the latest methods of measurement to test public relations efficacy. But the future is upon us already and we now need to move on to 'next practices' – practices that isolate the factors influencing the future, identify tomorrow's opportunities and thereby position a country poised to join the global band of leaders.

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