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SME WORLD

The Next Level

e-Edition

Next Level for Retail & Marketing



Manoj Juneja

*Vice President,
Sales & Marketing, Timex Group India*

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Spreads across 7 acres area
- ◆ Operating in 3 shifts – 750 employees
- ◆ 2 production lines-Current capacity - 3000MT / Month
- ◆ 9 products with various cream varieties
- ◆ Consistently delivering high class quality products
- ◆ Strong management , commitment & disciplined workmen are key factors for success

PRODUCTS

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| ◆ Kwalty Glucose | ◆ Tiger Krunch |
| ◆ Tiger Glucose | ◆ Milk Bikis |
| ◆ Bourbon | ◆ Milk Cream |
| ◆ Good Day-Cashew | ◆ Treat Creams |
| ◆ Good Day-Butter | |

CSR ACTIVITIES



- ◆ Sponsored 1 lac litre capacity drinking water tank in Abban Kuppe village
- ◆ Monthly feeding of orphanage children
- ◆ Text book & note books distribution for school children

Award and Recognition

- IMC Ramakrishna Bajaj National Quality Award 2011
- Business Profitability Partnership Award, 2012 from BIL
- Rotary BSE SME National award for excellence. 2012
- Good Day Gold League Gold Trophy Award 2013,
- 2nd Place in Everyday Perfect Good Day Contest 2014,
- Best Good Day Cashew manufacturing unit, Perfect Good Day Contest 2015.

Gobal Recognition by AIB International



Paramount added another feather in its cap when it was adjudged the 1st Britannia CP unit to get AIB Recognition in India scoring 820 out of 1000 in February 2018. AIB is considered as one of the stringent Food Safety norms across the globe.



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Business Development Nitin Soni
Layout & Graphics Jai Shanker Shukla
Photographer Trilok Chand

Industry Advisors Jagdish Singh (Corporate)
K.S. Ahluwalia (Mentoring)
Atul K. Thakur (Academic)

Mumbai Bureau Bhavesh Kothari
+91-9820436076
Bangalore Bureau Dr. Aswath M. U. (Head)
+91-9845262955
aswathmu@yahoo.com
Chennai Bureau V. Ravichander (Head)
+91-98410 47174
Kolkata Bureau Biswajit Mazumdar
+91-9831341171
Ahmedabad Mayuri Acharya
+91-9909009970

Representatives

Chandigarh : Santosh Singh
+91-9417900555
Uttarakhand : Pradeep Garg
+91-9412021727
Overseas: Sudok Yi, Seoul (S. Korea),
++82-11-2500181,
Jayant Khanna,
New York (US),
++1-91-7-6867286,

UAE Representative Office: AWBECO FZ LLC
Office 206, Building 8,
Dubai Media City,
Dubai (UAE)
+971 4 3604768
info@awbco.biz
overseas@smeworld.asia

Digital Solutions for MSMEs

Contract Execution, Enforcement and Delayed Payments

While the Government has been promoting 'ease of doing business' by initiating various measures and there has been an overall 'jump' India has witnessed in the ease of doing business Index, MSMEs still continue to grapple with many issues that are preventing them from realising their full potential. The Country still lags in the area of 'enforcing contracts' (163rd) and registering property (154th). It takes 58 days and costs an average 7.8% of a property's value to register it, longer and at greater cost than among OECD economies, and it takes three times longer for a company to resolve a commercial dispute through a local first-instance court, as compared to OECD countries.

To achieve significant improvement in the area of 'contract enforcement' the Government should encourage and incentivize use of digital execution of contracts and their resolution. Besides, enforcement of contracts should also be simplified through a separate mechanism such as dedicated Alternative Disputes Redressed Mechanism (ADRM) for businesses, virtual MSME tribunals etc. Such mechanism could result in quick resolution with respect to delayed payments and other disputes which in turn would also address the issue of working capital shortage of business enterprises.

Further, the vendors of goods and services primarily the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have long been facing the problem of delayed realization of their bills and sales invoices from their buyers and receivers of services leading to financial hardships and liquidity constraints; a key reason for many of them turning into 'Non Performing Assets' (NPAs). With the introduction of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and the strict measures recommended by RBI for taking stringent action against NPA accounts, the business entities face twofold pressure of working capital shortage and the looming threat of turning into NPA for their inability in honouring bank commitments. Considering this situation, there is an urgent need to devise an effective and practical mechanism to resolve this issue.

In this regard, following measures are expected to be quite effective:

Digital execution of legal agreements for prefixing of payment terms of Invoices & Bills

It is essential to get all regular and big buyers and customers to sign an agreement and make them agree to terms and conditions that specify when they must pay vendor's bills & invoices. The sellers are interested in getting payments in time as per agreed terms but, when they supply goods and services to their buyers without any written commitment or a legal protection, they become vulnerable and have to plead for realization of their payments. A one time agreement can be executed digitally between MSME vendors & their buyers in the beginning of business relationship to secure payment of all future sales invoices & bills. This will not only bring clarity to the future paying process but also serve as evidence before any Facilitation Councils or Arbitrators and other Adjudicating Authorities. The legal process for recovery of dues can also be fast tracked with online adoption of Alternative Disputes Redressal Mechanism (ADRM). Such

IOUX will prove to be a game changer for the country's millions of MSMEs who have been facing big hassles in the execution of their legal formalities, says Dr H. P. Kumar, Co-Founder, IOUX. He adds that "small businesses often play into the hands of the middlemen who would make them spend huge money executing the legal work. IOUX comes to their rescue and a big relief as almost everything is done online and legally saving their precious time."

digitally executed 'Invoice Payment Commitment' agreement can be accessed anytime by the adjudicating authorities to serve as legal evidence of the underlying transactions. This will substantially cut down the time taken by Adjudicating Authorities or Courts in establishing the evidence. Once the evidence is established, the judgement about the claim should not take much time.

Thus, Digital execution of Invoice Payment Commitment Agreement and their resolution through digital means will substantially resolve the problem of delayed payments and bring ease of doing business for millions of business units.

IOUX – an innovative solution for Invoice Payment Commitment

The IOUX Invoice Payment Commitment is exactly a mechanism which helps the sellers to fix payment terms in advance with their buyers and helps in realization of all invoices irrespective of whether credit is extended or not by the seller to the buyer. Invoice Payment Commitment Agreement creates a strong legal evidence of payment obligation from the buyer/debtor to the Seller/Creditor.

How does Invoice Payment Commitment work?

The buyer and seller sign a onetime e-agreement on IOUX platform with proper e-KYC. Any supplier of goods and services can e-sign this agreement within few minutes and seek prior acceptance of Invoice and Bill with buyer's commitment to make payment

by a specified date. It also empowers the seller/creditor to avail financing based on the acknowledged Invoices and accepted Bill of Exchange. In addition, IOUX legally establishes the liability and fixes the date on which payment is to be made by the buyer to the seller, mitigating payment risk. IOUX can send automated gentle reminders to the buyer before due date of payment to ensure fulfilment of his commitment.

So, both parties benefit when they execute an Invoice Payment



Dr. H.P. Kumar
Ex-Chairman & Managing Director,
National Small Industries Corporation

Commitment since it mutually accommodates both the buyer and the seller. It strengthens the relationship of the seller with his buyers and establishes a legal framework from the very beginning of starting the trade relationship which can later be used for early resolution of any dispute for non-payment of bills.

IOUX – a new deal for MSMEs

IOUX is also an end-to-end digital contract execution platform, offering a fast, paperless and contactless way to execute any legal document/agreement. It helps to execute business or personal documents & agreements with following attractive features:-

- Safe and Secure with access from Digilocker.

- Assurance of legal enforceability.
- At a Nominal Cost (upto 5% of normal legal charges).
- Through NSDL e-Gov based eKYC & eSign infrastructure.
- From the comforts of home or office without physical meeting
- With added benefits of financing

Benefits of IOUX - A Smart Digital Solution for Ease of Doing Business:

- Access to legally-vetted customizable templates of Agreements & Statutory Documents across several categories for any of legal / business needs.

For example: Rent Agreements, Loan Agreements, HR Agreements, Non-Disclosure Agreements, Sales Agreements, Consultancy & Service agreements, other categories like Legal Notices, Letters, and several others.

- IOUX remotely authenticates Counterparties i.e. Buyers/ Sellers/ Borrowers/ Vendors/ prospective employees etc in a matter of minutes. It can
- digitally verify a persons Photograph, PAN Card, Aadhaar Card, Bank Account or other VID's helping the business to confidently engage with unknown people and businesses.
- IOUX Instantly prepares and executes documents & agreements over Computer/ Mobile App, it makes available e-Stamp Paper and provides Aadhaar based e-signing facility.

Paperless & Speedy negotiation and finalization of documents/agreements. IOUX is an ASP of NSDL eGov and its Aadhaar OTP based eSign does not require any USB or hardware dongle.

- IOUX sets auto-reminders for payment of commitment Sales Invoices & Cheques.

So, a business enterprise can go paperless using smart tools at IOUX to save operational and legal costs and enhance work efficiency. This platform can be accessed at IOUX.in or at the following contact details:- Shashank Saxena, Manager, IOUX, Mobile: +91 89297 19904

Email: shashanksaxena@ioux.in/

Next Level Retail & Marketing

Grow Communities and Focus on What They Say, not What you Deliver: Manoj Juneja



Manoj Juneja
*Vice President
Sales & Marketing,
Timex Group India*

The global retail and marketing ecosystem has undergone a sea change in view of the COVID-19 pandemic which has compelled businesses dealing in non essential goods to change gears. With India undergoing unlock 2.0, retailers have risen to make fresh strategies to attract customers back on track. It will be a big challenge for retailers to resume their operations and survive.

A lot of retailers need to revisit their strategies by resorting to 'promotions' and 'offers' to bring back not only their traditional but new customers also. It will be quite an effort to keep up with the changing customers' expectations.

Marketing and retail are integral to each other. Marketing is essentially the art of enticing a customer into the retail sales process and requires you to think carefully about all touchpoints during customers' interaction.

“The ever-evolving customer buying behaviors are the biggest peril for retail outlets. A customer might research the product online but still prefer to buy offline. Retailers need to integrate every channel of marketing available to interact with the customers better. At the same time, being able to measure the impact and quantify the integrated strategy can prove to be a great trick

In India, the retail eCommerce market would continue to grow at the rate of a strong double-digit for the foreseeable future. The expansion this year is predicted to return on the idea of the latest shoppers being added to the fray. The new crop of direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands selling to customers directly online are expected to further speed the expansion.

up their sleeves”, says **Manoj Juneja, Vice President - Sales & Marketing, Timex Group India, who** has over two decades of deep understanding of the consumer durables and sporting goods segment in the India & SAARC countries and has worked for companies like LG Electronics and Adidas India in senior leadership profiles. Previously Manoj spearheaded the sales & e-commerce verticals and led several strategic leadership roles in Retail, Digital and Marketing for leading brands.

SME WORLD recently interacted with Manoj Juneja:

Over the years with e-commerce ruling the roost, what has been the impact on retailing and marketing?

In India, the retail eCommerce market would continue to grow at the rate of a strong double-digit for the foreseeable future. The expansion this year is predicted to return on the idea of the latest shoppers being added to the fray. The new crop of direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands selling to customers directly online are expected to further speed the expansion. Some of these small towns and cities in India will see a peak in online retail due to the fascinating nuances created in e-commerce such as social commerce, subscription models and influence-led commerce. We will witness these changes setting a benchmark one after the other.

What are the challenges faced by Indian retail outlets?

The ever-evolving customer buying behaviors are the biggest peril for retail outlets. A customer might research the product online but still prefer to buy offline. Retailers need to integrate every channel of marketing available to interact with the customers better. At the same time, being able to measure the impact and quantify the integrated

strategy can prove to be a great trick up their sleeves.

You have had a diversified career in retail and marketing, what big changes have taken place?

In the last 10 years, the ever-growing direct-to-consumer brands can be attributed to the phase of the retail boom. The average age of the Indian population at 26-28 years old has made us revisit the marketing strategies over the last decade. Now, the marketing conversations are flowing more towards creating communities and having a dialogue at every diverse channel available. Social Media has been a great mix in the consumer sales funnel with giving access to both, the consumer as well as the retailer. While we see a change in consumers' behaviors and their growing demands, Ecommerce paves the way to reach and serve the dynamic consumer at the same time. With a boom in the digital space in the recent years, brands have seen a major shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing tools. Digital marketing is the future and has become critical for success of the brands in the contemporary scenario.

India is seen as the fastest-growing Retail Market making start-ups scared of entering the segment. Comment!

With India being the third-largest home to startups in the world, this year has set a benchmark for what the future of startups will look like. We already have unicorns in sectors like e-commerce with Nykaa, Flipkart, and in fintech like Paytm and Zerodha to name a few. If you follow their trail, you will notice the enormous base of loyal consumers that they have created. They streamline dynamic consumer journeys with the millennials and their “research online, purchase online” behaviors. Focus on creating

technologically enhanced brand experiences and memorable consumer interactions across all available channels should be at the cornerstone for every startup that wishes to enter the market.

Now, more than ever, we are seeing the effects of living in the digital age. According to you, what should be the new digital marketing strategy?

My input on digital marketing is that it depends on which part of the Marketing Funnel we want to look at, accordingly we can choose our digital marketing strategy. For instance, engaging with your consumer base and having a dialogue can be done on a relevant channel and with an approach different than one uses for creating awareness. Earlier we had only revenue and sales to depend on but with the help of sophisticated tools available today, you can measure the diverse strategies at lightning speed. This led to far-reaching effects in tracking and measuring the ROIs for your marketing efforts.

About Manoj Juneja

Juneja has an MBA in Sales and Marketing and a diploma in Digital Business Strategy from Emeritus Institute of Management. Known for his strategic thinking and long-term sustainable business approach, Manoj believes in building trustworthy relationships and long-term human connections. Goal driven and determined, he hopes to further transform Timex Group India with a refreshed strategic vision that embodies multi-channel strategies and tactical alignment to build momentum towards business growth.



Sanjay Shrotriya

While we have already witnessed fourth industrial revolution also known as Industry 4.0 or IR4, the expanding and strengthening internet ecosystem in India is giving rise to the new business models. It is also helping explore the new ways of doing business. Internet is the fuel that propelled e-commerce in India and the world.

D2C - An Opportunity for MSMEs In India

The growing number of internet connections, smartphone ownership is further enabling small and big companies reach out and engage with their customers digitally. Today in India 36% is the online market penetration i.e. 36% of the Indian population, have bought at least one product online in 2020. And the potential is huge. Amazon and Flipkart are the two major multinational e-commerce players dominating Indian e-commerce market.

The digital ecosystem, supply chain management, contract manufacturing have evolved and matured so much so that you don't need to own a set up to be a full-fledged entrepreneur in FMCG or even in durable segment. You just need to identify the suitable need gap, right product, develop a brand, tie up with right manufacturing partner/s, open an e-commerce store and you are ready to do the business. You don't need to own warehouse and there is no need of a retail store too. Your website becomes your retail outlet and you sell your product online only. Either

register your products with existing e-commerce player or have your own online store, your e-commerce website. Demand generation and prospecting for the customer's needs to be initiated now. To have the visitors on your website and therefore the demand, the website can be promoted through various ways on different search engines and social media platforms. There is a whole new science of digital marketing to take care of that.

Huge Cost Saving

This new way of doing business is termed as Direct-2-Customer or D2C. Here you reach out to your

target audience directly and sell your products, completely cutting away the traditional distribution channel (distributor, stockist, C&F and retailers). This results in huge cost saving and money thus saved can be passed on as discount to customers or invested in building efficient delivery mechanism or new product development or all of that.

In last couple of years a lot of companies have adopted this new way and in fact there are companies doing business in this new D2C way only. They promote their brands online through social media and generate traffic on their website/e-store and sell directly from there.



With just 700 million internet connections and around 42% of smartphone penetration in India (2020), we are able to reach a value of approx. USD 46 bn ecommerce revenue in 2020. And, with the ever increasing internet penetration, smartphone ownership, 5G around the corner, the e-commerce sector is set to boom in the coming time.

Such companies and brands are called D2C companies or D2C brands. As per Avendus, a financial services firm, India is witnessing the rise of D2C brands across categories. India is estimated to have a USD 100 billion addressable market by 2025. Changing consumer behaviour (of Millennials, Gen Y & Z) and with over 700 million internet users, the D2C space is witnessing disrupting trends in India. Big Brands are being built only on D2C platform drawing millions of customers and revenue.

With the digital ecosystem, measurement of almost every performance parameter is possible that further strengthen the whole process and the efficiency. From the point when somebody clicking on your ad/post on social media to

E-commerce set to boom

With just 700 million internet connections and around 42% of smartphone penetration in India (2020), we are able to reach a value of approx. USD 46 bn ecommerce revenue in 2020. And, with the ever increasing internet penetration, smartphone ownership, 5G around the corner, the e-commerce sector is set to boom in the coming time.

As per India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF, a trust established by Dept of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, GOI), India E-commerce will reach USD 99 bn by 2024, growing at a 27% CAGR over 2019-2024, with grocery and fashion & apparel likely to be the key drivers of incremental growth. India's

this numbers will significantly grow in next five years. What is important to note here is that over 16 D2C brands have an annual turnover over USD 60 mn. Rising income, rapid internet adoption, changing consumer behaviour and buying preferences are some key factors giving rise to the digital-first brands.

Some D2C Brands in India

1. Bombay Shaving Company is the men grooming brand, closed FY20 with gross annualised revenues of Rs.40 Cr and expect to close FY21 with gross annualised revenues of Rs.105 Cr
2. Wakefita Bengaluru-based home solutions brand generated a revenue of INR 199 Cr in FY20
3. boAt, a fashionable consumer electronics, including an extensive catalogue of headphones, earphones, speakers etc, Crossed Rs 500 Cr in revenues in FY 2020 and is expected to double the number in FY2021.
4. MyGlamm, one of India's fastest growing beauty brand has been witnessing tremendous revenue growth and generated Rs 200 Cr ARR in FY20.
5. Mamaearth is one of India's fastest-growing brands in baby care segment, crossed the Rs 100 Cr turnover mark in just four years and Asia's first brand to get the MadeSafe certification for its toxin-free products.
6. Fit & Glow (WOW Skin Science) is in wellness and personal care space that uses organic ingredients. In 2016, WOW became a top-five brand in the health segment on Amazon India.
7. Super Smelly is India's first and only certified zero toxin personal



visiting your website and to finally becoming your customer, this person leaves behind his/her digital footprints at every step. A lot of data gets generated and saved at every step. The data thus generated is then cut, sliced, diced and minced to generate insights and information useful for more efficient planning and decision making in future. Consequently, with the help of this massive trove of data, the entire lifecycle of the customer can be tracked and efficiently managed, thereby offering them better products and services. In the conventional business scenario this thing is almost impossible. This is the power of internet and digital data.

ecommerce order volume increased by 36% in the last quarter of 2020, with the personal care, beauty & wellness (PCB&W) segment being the largest beneficiary. Tier 2&3 cities accounted for a 90% YOY incremental volume and value growth in the e-commerce market in the last quarter of 2020. Also these cities reported significant gains in share of the overall e-commerce sales volume (from 32% to 46%) and value (from 26% to 43%) in the last quarter of 2020.

This momentum in the e-commerce space will surely give rise to more D2C brands in India, a field where MSME's can play a vital role and be benefitted from it. Currently there are around 600 D2C brands in India and



care brand that offers products specially formulated for the teenage skin. Revenue INR 12 Cr (FY 20-21)

Lenskart, Licious, Zivame, Healthkart, Country Delight, Namhya Foods, Ustra, Bombay Shirt Company, Yaiy! Naturals, Upakarma Ayurveda, Sleepycat, Bewakoofetc, are Some other D2C brands are operating in niche segments, becoming aspirational and generating amazing value. Some brands, after tasting success on online, are adopting the omnichannel strategy too to expand their footprints, both on ground as well as in consumers' mind.

The E-commerce industry has been directly impacting micro, small & medium enterprises (MSME) in India by providing means of financing, technology and training and has a favourable cascading effect on other industries as well. Indian E-commerce industry has been on an upward growth trajectory and is expected to surpass the US to become the second largest E-commerce market in the world by 2034. Technology enabled innovations like digital payments, hyper-local logistics, analytics driven customer engagement and digital advertisements will likely support the growth in the sector as stated by India Brand Equity Foundation (Govt. Of India).

Internet is no more the luxury in the hands of few but is now democratised and has reached to almost every individual. It's the oxygen that the new businesses are breathing on and more importantly the brands that are doing business on internet, the D2C brands. Unlike that

of old times when entering into the field of business used to require a lot of capital, today, that entry cost is low, making it suitable for small entrepreneurs.

Today with the help of technology generating demand, reaching out to new consumers, getting real-time consumer feedback, smart logistics

are all possible to build new business. Investors too are inclined towards the D2C category because of the growth they are envisaging in the sector. There seems to be enough room for small & large players to be accommodated, for the sheer size of the market and its fragmented nature.

The entire ecosystem is conducive too, therefore, start it small and make it big!

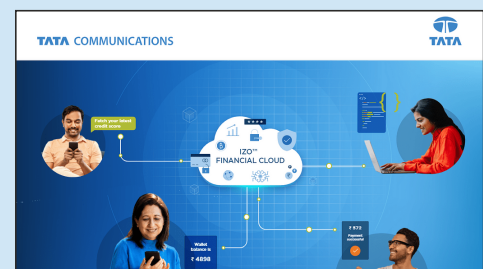
-Sanjay Shrotriya is Independent Marketing Consultant.

Tata Communications launches IZOTM Financial Cloud platform in India

Tata Communications, a global digital ecosystem enabler, today announced the launch of 'IZOTM Financial Cloud', a purpose-built community cloud platform, enabling next-gen digital transformation, customised to meet the stringent data privacy and protection compliance and security guidelines defined by India's regulators for the Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI) sector. Developed on Tata Communications IZOTM Private Cloud, this platform aids in building an open banking ecosystem that offers BFSI and FinTechs, the foundation to enable advanced digital services. It also allows international banks to expand their footprint in India by meeting the country's data residency requirements.

to strengthen their customers trust by operating on a platform that is secure, compliant and supported by a transparent cloud model. It also enriches the end-user experience by enabling BFSIs to launch advanced services with agility.

This purpose-built cloud platform



will assist financial organisations to modernise their legacy systems to support the next-gen banking services and accelerate their digital transformation. It will embed security for data, application, and perimeter to manage industry specific cyber risks. It will also fuel future growth in the industry by serving as the execution venue for new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML) and Blockchain.

With IZOTM Financial Cloud, the financial service providers are able



Sanjeev Mehtani



Revolutionary Growth in Gaming Industry

Acer Leads the Way for PC Gaming in India

PC with the best processors and graphics cards, reliable and high-performance laptops is a must in today's gaming industry. In terms of gamers today, we not only have a strong community of serious gamers, but casual gaming enthusiasts have also flourished significantly in number. This paradigm shift in the gaming sector can be attributed to technological advancement that has brought forth a more exciting revolution to gaming PCs.

PC gaming is fast becoming a favourable choice among millennial gaming enthusiasts, and this shift can be attributed to factors such as quality of game play, affordability, availability of high-end hardware and software, and improved internet bandwidth. Hence, the best PC games are getting more demanding and more comprehensive than ever.

Acer has brought in revolutionary and market-leading products from entry-level to hardcore gaming laptops. As a company we are known for bringing in the latest technology and first to the market. We were the first to bring in 11th Gen Intel Core processor based gaming laptops, first to bring the latest NVIDIA 3060 based gaming laptops. This is backed by industry-leading cooling technology which helps to deliver consistent gaming performance by keeping the machine at optimal temperature. Our complete line-up of gaming products starts from Aspire 7 gaming laptops for casual gamers, Nitro for enthusiasts and Predator for professional gamers.

These are complemented by a range of gaming accessories and high-end monitors.

Unstinted support

Our strong line-up of products has helped us to become one of the leading PC gaming brands over the years. All this would not have been possible without the unstinted support of our business partners and a large number of our loyal patrons.

an important market for Acer's consistent efforts towards building a strong gaming ecosystem in India and empowering gamers through several programs and initiatives.

I believe, while mobile gaming offers convenience, and mobility but PC gaming offers a professional, graphics-intensive, and high-end gaming experience. Gaming laptops these days are not just thin and light but also come ready with high



refresh rate displays, larger battery life, high-end graphic cards, fast processors, and enhanced cooling systems. PCs allow better control over the game, allowing you to incorporate various gaming accessories such as gaming keyboard, mouse, headset, etc. that only boost your in-game experience. With technology evolving at an exponential rate, the gaming industry will see revolutionary growth in years to come with new trends shaping up the gaming landscape in the country.

It is a matter of pride that Acer's efforts besides going beyond presenting world-class products have also recorded creditable achievements. For the last five years, our Predator Gaming League has been one of the most sought after e-sports events in the calendar. This initiative is a testament to India being

*-Sanjeev Mehtani,
Country Manager- Sales,
Acer India.*



Gajavelli V S



Abhishek Jha



Mohit Prasad

The Pandemic & Rise of E-Commerce:

How SMEs are Grabbing the Pie

The Covid-19 Wave, Quest for Survival & Emergence of Digitalization

COVID-19 is not only a pandemic ravaging humankind in its own way but it has made the Integrated Global Economies, supply chains and financial markets much more fragile –in a word that is already fraught with geopolitical tensions and heightened economic uncertainty. The proven ability of globalization, liberalization and laissez-faire principals have since decades led the wave of sustained economic progress in spite of occasional regional - South Asian Crisis of 1996 - and global financial shocks including the financial meltdown of 2007-09. The world has been integrated as never before and the principal of "Comparative Advantage" has been almost universally operationalized across various regions and economies. This pandemic - unlike other systemic shocks of the past - has proved to be much more risky as the virus phenomenon is not so familiar and also not an offshoot of human actions nor irrational market sentiments.

To put the impact of the health crisis in perspective it will suffice to say that this COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected all aspects of the global economic order. Whether this will have a lasting structural impact on the global economy, or largely short term financial and economic consequences is hard to gauge given the nature of the crisis being largely biological and health emergency on a global scale. Further, the continuation of sustained stimulus by respective governments is a matter of concern too.

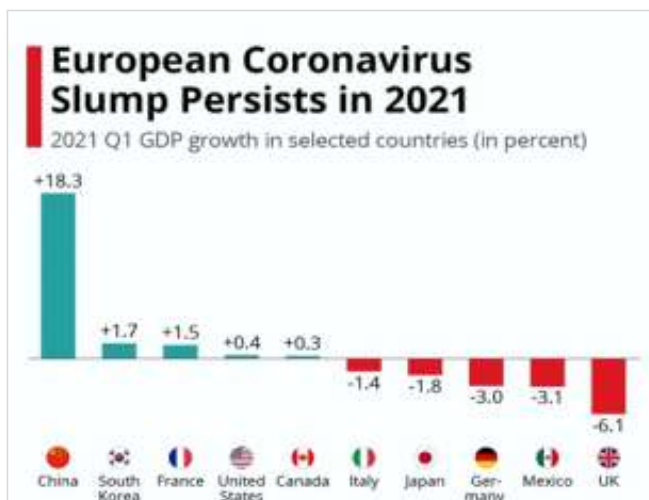


Figure 1:

Note: Year-on-Year data.

Source: The organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

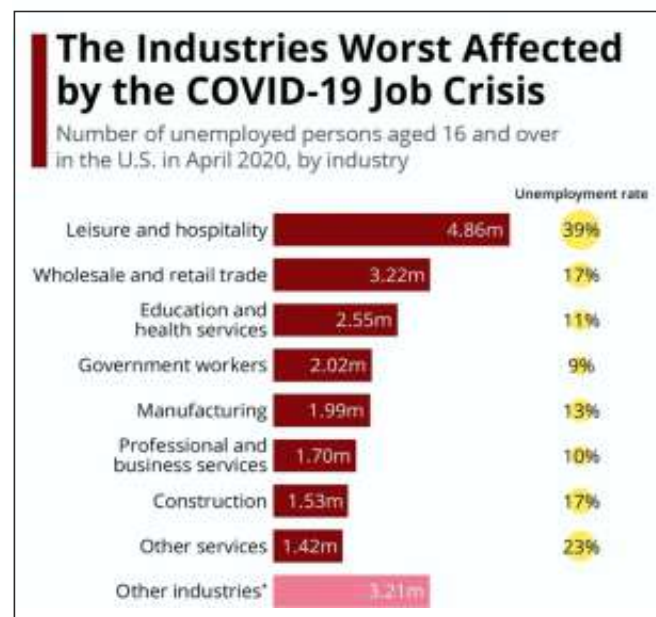


Figure 2:

Note: Includes people with no previous work experience or whose last occupation was at the U.S Armed Forces.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Emergence of Digitalization: The Upbeat & Optimistic side

That being said it has been established that because of high connectivity, globalization and economic inter-connectedness, the containment and mitigation of the pandemic has been extremely difficult and costly. In the midst of this gloomy global outlook, there has been a ray

The profitable growth story of E-Commerce in these turbulent times gives us hope as well as suggests multiple modalities which can be implemented to not only improve the gloomy economic conditions but also to save those who are most at risk. As we often say that necessity is the mother of inventions, and in our case 'change'.

of hope that is the continued, and in fact an increased popularity of E-commerce. The United States and UK saw a spike of 16.1% and 31.3% in the share of E-Commerce in total retail between the first and second quarters of 2020 respectively. The numbers are testimony to a paradigm shift in not only the worldwide consumption patterns but also in the way in which corporates choose to run their operations every day. This is a perfect example of "finding opportunity in adversity."

The Indian E-commerce market is expected to grow to US\$ 200 billion by 2026 from US\$ 38.5 billion back in 2017. Remarkable rise in gross merchandise value (GMV) sales of Flipkart and Amazon in India is a testimony to the changing landscape of consumer behavior. Pandemic has caused more and more people to take the online route to fulfill their consumption needs, e-tailers are witnessing high demands, including from far-flung and remote areas. Digital payments have seen a surge in its adoption prior to the pandemic itself, and the concept of safe distancing only adds to its adoption by people who ill-afford to physically visit a business store to purchase goods and consume services. The economic growth story of E-Commerce in these turbulent times gives us hope as well as suggests multiple modalities which can be implemented to not only improve the gloomy economic conditions but also to save those who are most at risk.

E-Commerce: A Data Driven Change

The profitable growth story of E-Commerce in these turbulent times gives us hope as well as suggests multiple modalities which can be implemented to not only improve the gloomy economic conditions but also to save those who are most at risk. As we often say that necessity is the mother of inventions, and in our case 'change'. Even the familiar *Kirana* store is hiring unskilled labor to home deliver products of daily use. Another significant transformation for small businesses is to ride along the digitalization and data analytics wave themselves. Small businesses have resorted to fully functional E-Commerce websites which helps them to remotely accept orders and receive payments – all of this whilst providing the consumer the option of either picking up their order from the store, or delivering the order at the convenience of a customer's doorstep. This shift in consumer behavior has led to small businesses working with a hybrid customer experience, attempting to provide them with a best-of-both-worlds kind of an experience. To further augment the ease of operations, effective digital marketing strategies and various analytics tools such as Google Analytics aid small businesses

SMEs' Transformative Turn: Pushing Themselves for Bigger scale

The operations of SMEs, which employs 460 million people in the Indian Economy, was massively hit by the pandemic due to disrupted supply chains and countrywide shutdowns. The Mom & Pop stores, the familiar *Kirana* shops languished in these tough times. It is not easy and wholly pragmatic for a traditional brick & mortar store to take on giants like Amazon and Flipkart. But they don't need to, that way. There are instances abound of small businesses which have tied up with established E-Commerce players to aid generate profits utilizing the former's expertise. Cloudtail India, which is the single-largest seller on Amazon India, reported revenue growth of 25% for March 2019 quarter. Various Small and medium businesses, like Fivefarms Malakodu Estate, Custom Roasted Coffee Beans, Miss Ethnic, Zoya, Muscleblaze, INLIFE etc., are piggy backing their way to profits through this model. Similarly, many restaurants and food joints have greatly integrated themselves with delivery companies like Swiggy and Zomato. Traditional service providers like barbers, beauticians, masseuse, electricians and carpenters are being increasingly hired by companies like Urban Clap. What is needed now is a positive intervention by the governments worldwide, to augment this process by providing skill development - a relevant example of this is Internshala Trainings, a model which can be replicated to provide relevant skills at subsidized costs.

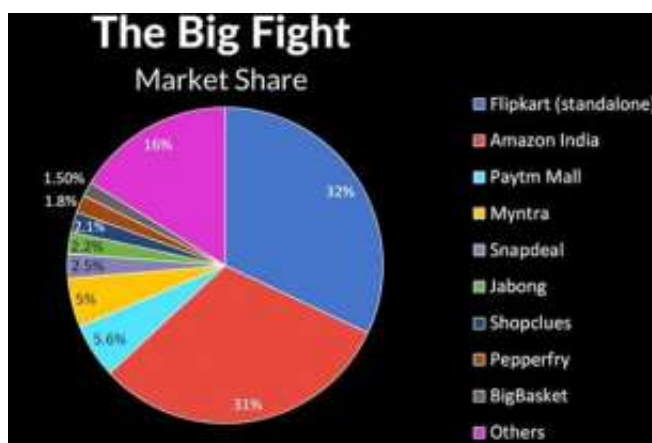


Figure 4:

Source: E-commerce Market Share (By Forrester)

E-Commerce: Helping Revival and Navigate Post-crisis Market Realities

Now let us explore the larger role these online E-commerce giants can play in our efforts to battle this pandemic. Global players like Amazon, Walmart, Alibaba have a huge database at their disposal which they combine with data analytics to show consumers

The pandemic has changed the map of sales and shopping for SMEs. The concerned ministries and agencies must launch special drives to provide consultations targeting SMEs most affected by the pandemic, in order to support these institutions to overcome the challenges. Government agencies elsewhere very aggressive and provides legal consultations in commercial and civil issues, administrative operations, review of contracts and agreements.

products which they are likely to purchase. This whole process can be re-programmed to augment government's efforts to recoup the difficult times. Their expertise in seamless delivery, database of addresses and phone numbers can be harnessed to disburse medicines and other essential supplies which can be picked up right from government approved warehouses and then delivered to the concerned household. All that it would take is a phone call from an affected person to a government established call center which could then outsource the whole process of collection and delivery to these E-commerce giants who have a proven track record, experience and expertise in this domain. This can check various malpractices like hoarding of medicines and other essential supplies.

The way forward: Far-sighted Policy & Uptbeat Business Culture

In context of the Indian Government, its attempt at reviving the growth of SMEs by a USD 40 billion collateral free loan grant did little to help SMEs, as the owners find no sense in adding to their debts in the middle of an already slowing business. There also have been six measures dedicated especially to MSME's under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" mission. These measures majorly pertained to Relief in Non-Performing Assets, clearing off dues to MSME's, Disallowing Global Tenders, Credit and Finance Scheme, Supporting Equity participation, and changes to the definition of an MSME. RBI introduced measures to ensure liquidity to help small businesses who are struck by the second wave of the pandemic. Also, one-time restructuring of loans for individuals and MSMEs has been allowed by the RBI up to September 30, 2021.

The operations of SMEs, which employs 460 million people in the Indian Economy, was massively hit by the pandemic due to disrupted supply chains and countrywide shutdowns. The Mom & Pop stores, the familiar *Kirana* shops languished in these tough times.

The pandemic has changed the map of sales and shopping for SMEs. The concerned ministries and agencies must launch special drives to provide consultations targeting SMEs most affected by the pandemic, in order to support these institutions to overcome the challenges. Government agencies elsewhere very aggressive and provides legal consultations in commercial and civil issues, administrative operations, review of contracts and agreements. The agencies also provide financial consultations in financial management, tax returns and value-added tax in addition to administrative consultations in crisis management, marketing, work plans, HRM, supply chain and quality management. For instance, Singapore government took measures that help local SMEs, like *Sanwa*, innovate their products and processes, accessing larger markets beyond Singapore and developing their skill sets and talents.

That way innovative business models supported by governments as well as big businesses is essential for the revival of SMEs during the pandemic, which continue to support a major chunk of jobs and create immensesocial value in emerging markets like India Inc.

About the Authors

Dr V. S. Gajavelli

Dr Gajavelli is a Professor and Chairperson-Center of Excellence for Sustainability, Growth & Development at Institute of Management Technology Nagpur, India. He has more than 28 years of experience in research, management education, conceptualization and administration of executive education programs, in-company training programs, faculty development programs and consulting.

Dr Gajavelli has presented and published several research papers in various national and international professional forums such as United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Nairobi-Kenya and International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE), Canada and authored books in the area of Economic Environment and Decision-making. He has several recognitions and professional awards to his credit, and can be reached at gajavellivs@hotmail.com

Abhishek Jha:

Abhishek is a graduating management trainee at IMT Nagpur, who has recently completed his summer internship as a Research Associate Intern at Verified Market Research (VMR). His primary responsibility at VMR constituted of extensive research and analysis on the evolving dynamics of numerous industries.

Mohit Prasad:

Mohit is a management graduate trainee at IMT Nagpur, currently interning at L&T Financial Services, Uttar Pradesh. He has previously worked as a manager at Papyrus Scrolls, where he was primarily responsible for business development and brand management.



Nitin Jain

MSMEs: Digital Marketing is Key to Business Growth

Usually when a small business is established, the focus is generally to get the first customer on board. By resorting to traditional approaches like local advertisements, print material etc., a brand tries to find a way to connect with its potential customers. However, these age-old approaches are outdated in today's ever-evolving market scenario. With the introduction of modern technologies and a paradigm shift towards digitization accelerated by the pandemic, every business is going digital.

Brick and mortar businesses are either moving to e-commerce or are rethinking their digital marketing strategies to capture a wider, more active consumer base. The online marketplace has become a lucrative opportunity for most businesses to benefit from, simply by reaching a larger audience and being readily available. And while most big businesses possess the capabilities and strategy to digitalize, several small businesses suffer from the lack of awareness of opportunities that lie with going digital. Even if they do understand the need to go digital, they are often faced with either the lack of a digital strategy or find it cumbersome to invest the time and money needed to take their business online.

The traditional presence for MSMEs may have worked until a few years ago, it isn't an option anymore. In the post pandemic scenario the entire business ecosystem has undergone a sea change. The pandemic has created a need to shift to a digital model, and therefore, several small businesses are facing the challenge to adopt technologies into their business process. The lack of knowledge of new technologies is another major roadblock for most small businesses.

Further to that comes the challenge to find affordable skilled talent; talent that is necessary to build and manage the digital infrastructure effectively and which is difficult to find in tier 2 and 3 markets. With the government's push for an Aatmanirbhar Bharat, brands of all scale and shape need to find a way to be self-reliant and successful.

Survival at stake

Today's customers are well researched and often look up for information online before making the purchase. It hence becomes critical for businesses to have an online presence that ensures brand visibility. Creating an advanced business website can take anything between a week to several months, and realizing the time taken, we at NowFloats offer tailored services through Boost360. The platform requires no need for coding and involves no additional expense for web hosting or to set up servers; Setting up a website is done in a matter for 5 minutes. Furthermore, its Do-It-Yourself (DIY) capability allows businesses to setup, manage their workflows and grow, online, across multiple channels and social networks. All of this can be done over an easy to navigate application without much prior technical knowledge or skill.

Having an online presence opens the portal for online customer traffic. Unlike the traditional approach, in digital marketing, customer queries are needed to be resolved online, in real time and much more efficiently. A rising number of MSMEs are warming up to the concept of adopting the latest technological trends as more of their practical benefits are being realized. Technology has immense power to enrich the small business experience for customers and empower them to play shoulder-to-shoulder with big

About NowFloats

NowFloats Technologies Pvt. Ltd. is a SaaS company that helps SMBs & retail businesses take their business online effortlessly, and enterprises, optimize their digital products. With 53 million businesses wishing to connect with over 600 million internet users in India, NowFloats' mission is to help them do it easily and quickly without any need for technical knowledge. Founded in 2012 in Hyderabad, it now has customers all over India for 3 of its main products: Boost 360, Zadinga & Kitsune. Its team of 150 people ensures every business using NowFloats' products becomes truly digital by offering solutions such as local content discovery platform, online business management suite, website promotion, marketing solutions, among other B2B services.

corporations. Digital marketing should not come as an afterthought to MSMEs, but as a key part of their operations. At the same time, the transition to digital should be easy to navigate, implement and upgrade. We understand that while digital marketing is integral to a business, it does not have to be a long-drawn process. Digital marketing and campaigns can be created and expanded even without technical knowledge with the support of DIY modules, which can further expand the reach of digital tools across sectors and cities in India. The ultimate goal is to empower MSMEs to become self-sustainable by going digital.

*-Nitin Jain, Co-Founder
of NowFloats. ■*



Dr. T. K. Chatterjee

Ankshuman Baruah

"It's not just about what's right from the perspective of the success of your business, but it's also what's right for your customers and society. And as you scale, those priorities can change." - Reid Hoffman, Co-Founder, LinkedIn

Why Consumers Prefer Brands with Purpose

- An analysis of purpose-driven marketing by brands

What is purpose-driven marketing and why is it important?

Any aspiring marketer must know the 4Ps of marketing. Product, price, place, and promotion. No prizes for getting that one right! The 4Ps have largely determined a company's gamut of marketing strategies. But the pandemic has brought into effect a fifth 'P' in the marketing mix – 'Purpose'.

What is purpose-driven marketing? It is a type of marketing where the brand connects with the audience through a cause that both the customers and the company believe in. It is a fantastic way for an organisation to connect with the audience based on common interests and beliefs. One may promote gender equality, human rights, while others may focus on using eco-friendly methods throughout the supply chain. Today's consumers are five-times more likely to transact with a brand that has a strong affiliation towards a cause. According to Deloitte research of 2021, 79% of the consumers recalled brands that have contributed positively during the COVID-induced pandemic. Another research by Harvard Business Review finds that 64% of the consumers transact with a brand, with whom they shared values. Purpose-driven marketing helps immensely in terms of recognition and improved loyalty.

We are living in interesting times - worldwide pandemic, enforced

lockdowns, collapsing economies. In this scenario, where every day the scope of 'new normal' keeps evolving, marketers need to make sure that the brand messaging is 'purpose-driven', with dexterity. There needs to be a complete revamp of the branding formula to make communication more 'purposeful', which is likely to improve a brand's recall in this competitive arena. It will also help the brand to stay relevant and organic in the minds of the audience. Adding purpose at the core of any brand communication means authentic storytelling, boldness and imbibing the purpose across the whole organisation.

Times are tough, and this is the time for brands to be empathetic in messaging and communications. Pandemic has taught us to value people and contributions. Hard-selling products or services in today's scenario will do no good to the brand. Instead, communication must be more human-centric, credible and sustainable.

How can brands embrace purpose?

Brands are in a powerful position to give a voice to people and causes that need it. But how can they become more 'purposeful'? Firstly, the brand needs to identify how it can contribute to the fight against COVID. If the organization has, say, provided monetary or product donations, or run a massive volunteering program, the brand can communicate and amplify the work

so that the mass can get inspired and hold the brand in high regard. Cab-hailing app Ola started initiative #O2For India to provide door-to-door delivery of oxygen concentrators to consumers through the vast network of cabs. They were given free of charge to the kins of the patients through partner NGO GiveIndia. Some brands, such as Asian Paints, pivoted and chartered into unknown territory by producing hand sanitizers and PPE kits, at a time our nation was facing an acute shortage of sanitizers. Viroprotek by Asian Paints is one such instance.

Many brands have joined hands with dozens of NGOs to contribute to this firefight against COVID pandemic induced shortages. Hyperlocal service provider Dunzo is a favourite amongst the youth on Instagram for its quirky, entertaining content. However, the much-loved social handle has dedicated posts to raising awareness about COVID-induced shortages and partnering with various NGOs for fundraisers. The brand has used playful puns (in a good way) to impart COVID-appropriate behaviour. PayTM and CRED have trodden similar paths in rewarding consumers for contributing towards the cause.

India's leading FMCG brand ITC has been sharing posts on the best COVID practices on its social media platforms. Beverages giant PepsiCo had started #MaskOnSwagOn, as part of a series to urge consumers to mask up, 'with swag' !

Consumer behaviour and preferences have witnessed a tectonic shift since the inception of the pandemic. Today, a consumer will connect with a brand organically which is humane in the way they communicate. Brands with purpose at its core is likely to see 2x growth and 175% increase in brand valuation, as against ones with lower sense of purpose, according to Kantar's Purpose Report 2020.

But one campaign that is currently winning a billion hearts is #DettolSalutes by Dettol. The latest campaign by the ubiquitous disinfectant brand celebrates people who have extraordinarily contributed during the pandemic. Dettol has replaced its logo with the faces of the COVID heroes on its liquid handwash bottles.

Several prominent digital influencers and celebrities, with lakhs of followers, have halted brand promotions in favour of contributing to the fight against the pandemic. For instance, influencer PrajaktaKoli, famously known as MostlySane on Instagram, teamed up with FindABed foundation, to help patients to search for hospital beds. She interviewed doctors on relevant topics like plasma donation and vaccination as well. She has a follower base of 3.9 million on Instagram !!

Dispelling the myths of vaccination

Brands are also discovering the innovative route to dispel fears of vaccinations. The main focus is on making jab seem cool. The content goalpost has evidently shifted from 'stay home, stay safe' to 'mask up' and now 'get jabbed!'. India currently has inoculated only 22% of the population (in terms of the first dose). The stats are even worse for double-dosed citizens, with only 5% inoculated. Cutting across sectors like food, hospitality, consumer goods, brands such as OYO Rooms, Durex, Domino's Pizza, have urged users to step out and get vaccinated, in different creative ways. Many brands have since jumped on the bandwagon and posted vaccine-related posts, in unique ways to capture the imagination and attention of the chronically attention-deficit youths on social media. This is an impressive cocktail of moment marketing and

purpose-driven content.

Global brands adopting purpose at its core

Shifting our focus away from COVID, an interesting case study of how brands can leverage purpose as a way of life is DOVE. The Unilever-owned soap brand has essentially transformed from being perceived as just another soap brand to a catalyst of change; on how the world views women, and how women must see themselves. In 2004, it launched the iconic 'The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty'. It was in response to a global study that found that only a meagre 2% of the women considered themselves 'beautiful'. Back in February this year, Dove India launched #StopTheBeautyTest campaign, narrating real-life stories of Indian women who were unfairly subjected to 'beauty standards' and called out for not being 'good enough' for marriage. The Unilever-owned brand has always believed the beauty should be a source of confidence, not a social taboo. *"I don't want to be normal -- that to me, is death. I was given a gift and I want to lock into it, I want to share it. I want to leave a legacy behind of disruptiveness, of loving the skin that I was born in."* - Lena Waithe, Actress

Another brand making waves, is American sports apparel giant, 'Nike'. The company not just believes in selling products, but building an emotional and aspirational image around its campaigns. Nike has associated itself with multiple causes, from 'Equality', which encourages athletes to be fair to each other on and off the field, to 'What will they say about you?', which sent out a message globally for women to smash the various barriers in life and take up sports as an empowerment tool.

Last year, Starbucks, the world's most-loved coffee brand, came out with #WhatsYourName campaign, which recognized the LGBTQ community. The campaign's objective was simple: to represent the transgender community and push them to open up and find their voices.

Conclusion

Consumer behaviour and preferences have witnessed a tectonic shift since the inception of the pandemic. Today, a consumer will connect with a brand organically which is humane in the way they communicate. Brands with purpose at its core is likely to see 2x growth and 175% increase in brand valuation, as against ones with lower sense of purpose, according to Kantar's Purpose Report 2020. Brands must harp on the opportunity to deliver campaigns that go beyond merely selling products or services, but instead connecting with the audience emotionally, and with a purpose and stand out. All that Brand Managers need, is to go back to our drawing boards and brainstorm the 'new normal' content.

About the authors

Dr. T. K. Chatterjee is an Associate Professor in Marketing Area in IMT Nagpur. He has 21 years of corporate experience and 14 years of teaching experience. He holds a PhD in Management from National Law University, Jodhpur. He has published several articles in National and International journals of repute.

Ankshuman Baruah is a PGDM Marketing student from IMT Nagpur. He is originally from Assam, residing in Mumbai for the past 20 years. He is a keen reader and is very passionate about social media marketing, branding, and startups. Recently, he interned with Jio Creative Labs, a full-service agency from the house of Reliance. Ankshuman is a firm believer of learning and unlearning for personal and professional growth.



Sonali Priy Kapoor



Financial Empowerment of Women is Crucial to Economic Growth

Women make practically 50% of the population in India; therefore, to drive economic growth, it is crucial to empower them. However, India ranked 139th out of 144 countries, with a 66% gender gap, in terms of economic participation, according to, 2018 report by the World Economic Forum. One of the prominent reasons for this gap is all women are not financially empowered across the nation and in rural pockets.

Let's start by understanding the difference between being financially independent and being financially empowered. So, financial independence is the capacity to make a living that empowers people to pay for their living to sustain themselves, while financial empowerment is to be in control of the finances and investments. A financially empowered person understands how they have to spend their money, make wise financial decisions, and has full authority to utilize resources to reach their goals.

Even though they are financially independent, many women in India don't have complete control over their finances. They hardly know how to utilize their earnings into investments, savings, mutual funds etc. A little effort to educate themselves financially can help them achieve true financial empowerment. Being financially independent not only gives a feeling of self-satisfaction; it additionally allows in building a healthy morale. It empowers women further, allowing them to make their very own choices and calling the pictures the manner they appear fit. This self-belief and feeling of fulfilment allows them to be self-sufficient, each emotionally and financially.

To start with, women can set financial goals, make a budget, pay

off debt, save for retirement, keep a check on bills and pay them on time, build an emergency fund. For a more comprehensive understanding, we can have a look at the below factors:

- **Be involved in financial decisions.**

Sitting with the family and participating in investment decisions will help every woman gain and explore knowledge on the financial front of the family and her personal as well. One should never hesitate to ask questions from the family financial advisor. To plan for an emergency, you need to figure out the vital details applying the basic framework of budgeting or goal setting or identifying the risk-reward



● You are your own investor

Women should have adequate exposure to investing starting at a young age. While exploring one's own financial front and plans, the need to invest comes naturally to one's mind. By investing at an early level of life, one learns to examine a sample of financial independence and discipline. Early funding teaches the actual distinction between investments and saving. It's never early to start learning about investments. Women can always seek expert's views to choose proper avenues to make accurate funding.

● Tackling emergencies swiftly

Being financially independent and empowered is an all-encompassing concept that serves as a one-stop solution for all kinds of problems, whether it's toxic domestic environments or financial and medical emergencies. This would further give women the freedom to lift themselves out of such situations without relying on others and being well prepared financially in loss of income. Another important chapter of life where women need to be well ready for is their retirement. For this, one can take the assistance of various financial apps and websites to devise your retirement goals.

● Help women; not lag for promotions and hiring.

The pay gap is one of the last frontiers in the fight for women's equality. According to a recent report compiled by LinkedIn titled the Opportunity Index 2021, it was found that 4 out of 5 working women (85 per cent) missed out on a raise, promotion, or work offer because of their gender. So help the young women in your life get comfortable

Being financially independent and empowered is an all-encompassing concept that serves as a one-stop solution for all kinds of problems, whether it's toxic domestic environments or financial and medical emergencies. This would further give women the freedom to lift themselves out of such situations without relying on others and being well prepared financially in loss of income.

asking for a raise to feed her soul the confidence she is looking for in herself.

● We must leverage opportunities to connect, learn, and continue to support each other.

The best thing we can do for the women in our lives is to pay it forward. If we get an excellent tip about business opportunities and advice to improve a particular task, we must not hesitate to pass it along to other women. It should be the same with money, work and life tips. Encourage her to seek out and act as a mentor, investor, advocate, sponsor in the world. And additionally, inspire to be open about any subject together along with her buddies and peers.

Despite the all-around headway women have made, finance and investing somehow got left behind for many of them. Yet, financial independence is the most crucial element of a 21st century's woman's life. It is not to prove a point but to ensure that women can break the stereotypes and support themselves if they want and need to. It makes them financially secure and enables them to make their own decisions, support their spouses, and finally, give a sense of achievement and accomplishment in a unique and empowering manner. And that's how we'll push forward in the fight for women's equality.

About Sonali Priy Kapoor

Sonali Priy Kapoor is a self-made businesswoman with a flair for identifying and adopting emerging trends due to her vast experience and in-depth knowledge of different industries. Sonali is very competent with her PR and marketing skills, which make it easy for her to connect with people and subsequently influence them to perform better.

Passionate about her dreams and venturing on her own, Sonali achieved success as a businesswoman, helping brands to grow. Being a woman, Sonali knows the struggles, the passion, the strength and the hard work a woman puts in. Hence she believes that women have leadership qualities and can go way beyond anyone's expectations in whatever they do.

Sonali is an alumnus of Indian School of Business Management & Administration. With almost 2 decades of experience in Brand Solutions and Communications, Sonali was leading Marketing & Communications for several global brands and has played a pivotal role in establishing their brand recall value. Taking forward this experience Sonali founded The Hatch Project, with the sole motive of designing creative and strategic solutions for brands and corporates in terms of Media Strategies, Brand Consulting, Integrated Communications, Image Building, Crisis Communication, Online Reputation Management, Social Media Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Stakeholder Engagement, all under one roof to ensure strong foothold of the client in their respective sectors.

Dr Rupani Captures Life with Precision Eye

Tech-Driven Dental Care is Her Commitment to Excellence

Camera has been her companion for over 12 years now. She is following her passion with the belief that 'Photography can change lives; it's all about your perspective'. Meet Dr Namrata Rupani who started her own Photography company, Capture Life, where she offers photography services and conducts these incredibly popular photography workshops from last 7 years.

High School, Delhi and is a graduate in Dentistry from Christian Dental College, Ludhiana. Dr. Namrata furthered her education with fellowships in Pediatric dentistry and Aesthetic dentistry. She has over 17 years professional experience in the

She ventured into the Fine Art Print business as well under the same name to make fine art prints and provide design and print solutions for various clients from all over India. Her work has been displayed at various exhibitions, including commissioned by L&T to document the making of the Metro Rail in India, having exhibited on for FICCI ON International Ladies Day, and more recently a Solo Photography exhibition by the Goethe Zentrum, Hyderabad, titled "Stories in Stone" – a depiction of old architecture from all over India. She is recognised internationally as a 'Fearless Photographer' which is the topmost forum for the best Wedding photographers from all over the world.

She has also shot over 100 weddings including international projects in Malaysia and Bahrain. Namrata is also recognised by 'This is Reportage' a popular international platform that showcases the best documentary wedding photography. It's that very perspective that Namrata shared on stage as a speaker at TEDxNalsarUniversity in 2016 – about just how far photography can travel from going beyond a passion to being able to connect with hundreds of people through a powerful form of art and expression.

Namrata also runs a successful dental practice in Hyderabad since the last 10 years. She is also a trained kathak dancer. Dr. Namrata Rupani attended Mater Dei



Dr Namrata Rupani

According to my experience, the answer to that is largely due to the prevalent lack of awareness. One of the primary reasons for this is neglecting the symptoms and waiting until the area starts to pain. Firstly, in most cases, no one thinks that there could be a dental issue until unbearable pain surfaces in the tooth or gum area.

field of dentistry of which 10 years have been spent running her own private clinic. She continues to advance her education and contribution to dentistry through guest lectures and various dental programs. At Capture Life Dentistry her mission is to provide dental services that are technologically current with a commitment to excellence.

“Capture Life, for me, is about two pursuits I am very passionate about, which have become a very integral part of my life through the years. Both are careers that require an intense eye to detail, but are extremely rewarding and fulfilling. For me, they are deeply interconnected and part of the banner 'Capture Life', under which I continue to spearhead businesses that 'capture' and bring forth something unique in their respective practices, which have propelled my professional career today”, says Dr Namrata.

Dr Namrata Rupani, Founder & CEO, Capture Life Dental Care, in an email interaction with SME WORLD:

How different is Capture Life Dental Care from others in the area of dental care?

Capture Life Dental Care differentiates itself on the premise that we continuously strive to upgrade and add the latest in technological advancements in our dental care arsenal. At Capture Life Dental Care, we carry the commitment to augment a good healthy lifestyle by keeping away dental problems and supplement it with good oral hygiene for the entire family. We believe in offering nothing but the best in terms of dental care and it is our mission to provide a 360-degree service to those who consult with us.

Kindly explain the basic concept behind Capture Care?

Capture Life was started as a consolidated venture which consists of my dental practice, photography, and fine art printing verticals. Capture Life Dental Care was conceived from the belief and the conviction that oral health care is essential for holistic health. This aspect of health care is a very important tool in preventive medicine. Oral healthcare, though neglected in our fast-paced lifestyle is quite essential for living a healthy and fulfilled life. We lay emphasis on dental hygiene while communicating and connecting with our clients, forging long lasting relationships with our patients, guiding them and

in a way that brings enormous benefits to our clients.

We also collaborate with established labs for our dental work. These labs use state of the art technology and equipment for certifying accurate readings and most importantly, sharing timely results to avoid loss of valuable time that increases our efficiency and effectiveness. In the mission to provide specialised treatments to our patients, we have segmented our practice to incorporate a set of specialist dentists. Each of them brings their own expertise and advancements in their respective fields when treating our patients.

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their families on a journey of excellent oral health. We also love doting on the kids who visit us, earning their lifelong trust and eliminating the fear of the dentist. Trust and a 360 degree dental counsel have been the building blocks of the practice, since its inception.

Please explain the tech-based dental care being practised by you.

We are constantly upgrading our equipment and methods in line with global standards and norms. Our team is committed to ensuring the inclusion of the latest innovation and technology in providing a premium dental care experience. We have a state-of-the-art digital OPG, which we will soon be upgrading to a CBCT. This transformation will aid in our diagnosis and treatment plans

Why is dental care not the preference of most in India? They turn to doctors only when in trouble. Please comment!

According to my experience, the answer to that is largely due to the prevalent lack of awareness. One of the primary reasons for this is neglecting the symptoms and waiting until the area starts to pain. Firstly, in most cases, no one thinks that there could be a dental issue until unbearable pain surfaces in the tooth or gum area. Many try to treat mild swelling with pain killers without the right diagnosis. Additionally, dental caries/cavities present themselves with literally no symptoms whatsoever in their initial stages. Secondly what most people do not know, is that a lot of systemic illnesses can be caught in time with a

routine dental check-up. According to the American Journal of the American Dental Association, there's a direct correlation between untreated gum disease or periodontitis and heart failure. Ignorance in these areas is the predominant cause for most Indians to visit a dentist post the pain and in the later stages of a cavity or dental caries.

What will you suggest to keep our teeth healthy? Why are no lessons in hygienic care being taught at the school level? What do you suggest in this regard?

Many schools are taking up the mandate to educate their students about dental care. In adopting oral health care, the students exercise this knowledge and practice hygienic oral care at home. This comes from my personal experience of being frequently invited as a guest speaker to build awareness in various schools in Hyderabad. In fact, before the Covid pandemic struck, our teams would be regularly conducting free dental check-up camps in a variety of schools. These periodic visits ensure we also impart adequate oral health practices to students, and we also maintain a good degree of follow-up sessions.

How useful have been your TED talks and what impact these shows have on young minds?

I was privileged to be invited to share my experiences on my passion for photography. The TED talk at TEDxNalsarUniversity was primarily focused on how photography changed my perspective on life and taught me to view the world through a different lens. The emphasis was to show case how far a love for photography can travel, and in my case, it went beyond being a passion, to being able to connect with hundreds of people through this powerful form of art and expression. I would like to think they sent out a universal message of daring to venture into the unknown and

overcoming any limitations of the mind to create and art and realise dreams.

How will you guide the commoner, especially children about dental care?

At Capture Life Dental Care, we take pride in imparting guidance on oral hygiene to all who visit us. We have a dental health care program that all of our clients experience when they come to our clinic for a consult. As a practice, each of these visits entails a detailed follow-up while providing adequate knowledge on best dental

practices for the entire family. I strongly believe that an appointment with the local dentist would help diagnose and prevent dental cavities even in their early stages. The practice of periodic dental visits lowers the overall probability of dental caries advancement and reduces the risk of tooth and gum diseases. We have witnessed an increase in the level of awareness of kids who participate in our dental care program since they exhibit the importance of oral and dental health care much prominently and influence their peers about the same. ■

MSMEs doubled in Kerala in last five years: Industries secy

The number of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the state has more than doubled in the last five years, said APM

Mohammad Haneesh, Principal Secretary, Department of Industries.

Reportedly, he said this while inaugurating the MSME workshop series organised by the Kerala Management Association.

"The main advantage of the sector is that MSMEs have been given the freedom to market their products," he added. G S Prakash, Joint Director of MSME Development Institute, said anyone wishing to start an MSME project can register online for free through Udyam Registration before December 31.

"Those who have not yet registered through Udyam will have the opportunity to re-register before December 31," he added. He also pointed out that the e-market is

also a market where MSMEs can sell their products at a better price. The biggest challenge facing MSME is the delay in getting the money. He also reminded that the trade receivables discounting system should be utilized to overcome this.

Prakash said that the MSME Act provides for MSEs to approach the Micro and Small Enterprises Facilitation Council (MSEFC) constituted by the state government if it takes more than 45 days to receive the payment. The MSME unit also has a facility to lodge a complaint on the portal MSME Samadhan regarding payment delays. There are several marketing support systems available.

"Entrepreneurs can only take full advantage of this if they understand exactly what it is. We should try to utilize most of SIDBI's plans for the MSME sector. The MSME ministry has recently set up a grievance redressal portal to lodge complaints and suggestions against the central and state governments and banks," Prakash asserted. ■

Speaking Herbs

Aiming to be Global leader with Golden Standard for Botanical Ingredients in India and Overseas

When biotechnology experts Amis Ahmed and TanayaSarma, both with high-level qualifications in Biotechnology discovered the truth behind what most companies sell as healthy and organic to their customers, they were sure that things needed to change, and quickly. “When you look at any self-care product that promises to be organic, toxin-free and a 100% safe-to-use for people, but refuses to be transparent about the quantities and even the complete list of ingredients which they choose to include in their products, how does one trust

such a product philosophy”, questions Tanaya Sarma, one of the founders of 'speaking Herbs', a premium botanical brand, having products across personal care, beauty, wellness and home care. “Our self-care products consist of a wide range of completely 100% toxin”, claims Amis Ahmed, the co-founder.

The Speaking Herbs' concept is 'BuyLessDoMore' which focuses on tackling over-consumerism in the self-care market much more directly. This is done by creating multi-tasking products that offer many benefits, so that any customer can 'BuyLessDoMore' with each and every product offered by Speaking Herbs.

Says Tanaya, “our mission is to bring the safest, most bio-active and effective botanical ingredients in their purest and undiluted form, from across India to your doorstep, thereby



TanayaSarma and Amis Ahmed

empowering you to lead a toxin-free and healthy lifestyle.” Amis Ahmed says that their vision is clear - to be the global leader and the accepted golden standard for botanical ingredients in India and across geographies.

The duo shares more with SME WORLD in an email interaction.

Describe the basic concept and idea behind Speaking Herbs.

Speaking Herbs' core mission is to empower people with super effective botanicals and the know how to employ them in every day care thereby avoiding the usage of conventional consumer products that contain toxic chemicals and are proven to be harmful for human health and as well as for the environment.

In the process, we are creating the world's largest single branded store of botanical ingredients that are 100% pure, supremely efficacious and potent. We are raising the bar and constantly pushing ourselves to set up a gold standard for botanical ingredients through bio-molecular and bio-activity based profiling. Speaking Herbs is the world's only brand that is enabling people to '#BuyLessDoMore' and '#BlendItClean' across beauty, personal care, wellness & home care verticals.

Why BuyLessDoMore?

Consumerism has been the driving force of the disastrous carbon impact we all have on the planet as individuals. With marketing commercials selling us every second we end up buying products that we may not have needed in the first place, and this vicious cycle of earning and buying propels the fire of industrialization and consumerism.

We believe that at any given moment we usually have multiple products on our shelves that can be replaced by a single high performing and multi-

tasking product. For eg, a pure sweet almond oil can be your go to moisturizer, a great hair oil, under eye serum and also an excellent food supplement for your heart and brain.

That's where our proposition of BuyLessDoMore comes in whereby we encourage people to do more with our multi-tasking botanicals and slowly make way for minimalism instead of consumerism in their lives.

Why BlendItClean?

With the advent of petrochemicals, a tsunami of synthetic molecules overshadowed the natural world. Modernists were in awe of the science and ease of creating molecules in the lab at a very cheap price but less was known about their impact on the health of individuals

hair oil label goes something like this : Mineral oil 77%, vegetable oil (including almond oil) 21.2%, Vitamin E, Perfume, TBHQ, CI 47000, 26100.

If we deep dive into the label, we see that the exact percentage of almond oil is nowhere mentioned, neither is the amount of Vit E (which first of all is a synthetic version of naturally occurring Vitamin E) or the contents of perfume (the word perfume seems to be a trade secret which consists of upto 1000 different chemicals). The base (mineral oil) is a petrochemical derivative, where as TBHQ is tertiary butylhydroquinone and CI 47000, 26100 are two cosmetic ingredients (colourants) 1,3-Isobenzofurandione and 1-(4-



and the environment. Today the majority of products in the market contain more than 95% synthetic chemicals, many of which have been proven to be carcinogenic, endocrine disrupting and causative agent of several other modern ailments. Most of the people are unaware of that and do not even read the ingredient labels, or even if they read, the complex jargon of chemical nomenclature is difficult to grasp. Apart from this, there is no transparency of what and how much of an ingredient actually goes in the product. For eg, a famous almond oil

(Phenylazo)phenylazo)-2-naphthol respectively.

There is definitely no transparency and the label is simply a toxic cocktail of synthetics.

With BlenditClean we encourage people to blend their own potions whether for skin care, hair care or even wellness from our collection of pure and unadulterated botanicals, so that they can know what exactly they are putting onto their bodies.

What is special about your enterprise since herbs are universal and common?

The biggest challenge is to differentiate yourself. We are different from our competitors in terms of our core focus on mono-herbal/botanical ingredients rather than pre-formulated products. Our commitment to creating the gold standard in botanical ingredients through scientific analysis, efficacy studies and zero tolerance to toxic chemicals, synthetics and adulteration is what sets us apart from them.

Yes Herbs or any botanical for that matter is definitely universal. But what differentiates a good natural product is its efficacy and efficacy is directly dependent on where you have grown, the way you have harvested or processed the herb.

And this again reinforces the urgency to create a gold standard in the market for botanicals. Because when there are innumerable me too products out there, what factor defines which is the best one. for sake of example let's take, almond oil - how would you say which brands almond oil is the best ? because everyone claims to be the best. There are almond oils in the market containing at least 76% mineral oil.

We identify ourselves as a direct to consumer brand. Our botanical ingredients or regimens can be bought only through our own website and we do not involve any third party distributors in between.

Also when we say almond oil, it should be simply pure almond oil, which is good to eat, good to apply on body as well as hair.

At Speaking Herbs we are solving this problem through four differentiators :

1. Sourcing the botanical raw material from the best geographical location and grown with the best natural agricultural practices. For example, Kalonji/Black seed from Rajasthan, Tea tree from Australia, Hemp from Uttarakhand etc.
2. Minimal processing of the botanical without any addition of chemicals or preservatives in order to maintain the natural state of its biomolecules.
3. Molecular fingerprinting for specific biomarkers that we can assess from every batch to batch thereby maintaining the desired quality and efficacy.

4. Packaging them in the most inert material -pharmaceutical grade amber glass - that protects them from light induced oxidation and chemical leaching that can happen in other forms of packaging.

How do you procure herbs; do you have your own herbarium or fields?

We procure the botanical raw materials directly from farmers or farmer cooperatives. Currently we do not have our own herbarium and even in the future we would like to be asset light and have farmers as partners wherein we will be guiding them with best Agricultural and harvest practices and incorporate in situ processing for delicate botanicals. This will in turn help the farmers earn better incomes.

Do you do any research apart from what is known in the market?

Yes we do, our research and development is at three levels:

1. Linking efficacy and geographical location of cultivation.
2. Setting up a standard biomolecular profile of the botanical ingredient to maintain efficacy across batches.
3. Combination of botanical ingredients and their efficacy in solving everyday concerns.

What kind of challenges do you face since there is stiff Competition in India?

The biggest challenge is to differentiate yourself. We are different from our competitors in terms of our core focus on mono-herbal/botanical ingredients rather than pre-formulated products. Our commitment to creating the gold standard in botanical ingredients through scientific analysis, efficacy studies and zero tolerance to toxic chemicals, synthetics and adulteration is what sets us apart from them.

The second biggest challenge is to retain the customers since there are

too many me-too products out there wanting to grab their attention. This we are achieving by maintaining the quality of the product, engaging with them across different purchase stages and building a close knit relationship by incorporating our customers feedback and suggestions into our decision making. Having a human face and emotion to the brand definitely helps.

What is the Business Model of Speaking Herbs?

We identify ourselves as a direct to consumer brand. Our botanical ingredients or regimens can be bought only through our own website and we do not involve any third party distributors in between.

What is the present turnover in India and explain your growth trajectory?

We serve roughly around 3000 customers a month and are growing at 15-20% m.o.m and currently, we are offering 19 ingredients across three categories i.e Carrier oils, Essential Oils, Hydrosols/floral waters.

Our growth Planning:

- We will be increasing the number of botanical ingredients we offer to 50 and launch new category verticals such as extracts and powders by the end of FY 2021-22. In the next three years we want to offer people at least 500 botanical ingredients.
- Launching 30 concern-based regimens across personal care, beauty, wellness and home care.
- Establishing a centre for botanical research for quality validation and efficacy establishment in partnership with premier institutes of research in India.
- Launching International delivery across Europe, USA, Latin America and Middle east.



Dr Chandni Tugnait

Productivity Killers for Entrepreneurs & How to Overcome Them

Whether for a start-up or an established business, an entrepreneur goes through a series of challenges in day-to-day life whether it is in the trends, opportunities, operations, marketing, management, accounts, competition, deadlines or other aspects and issues. What truly makes a business successful is productivity at every level.

The idea is not just to be 'busy' while indulging in reactionary work and getting things done but in actually being 'productive'. So, are we actually working all the hours we put in or are we mostly firefighting and staying tangled in the operations? The journey from being a business 'operator' to a business 'owner' requires us to identify the productivity killers and overcome them.

THE TOP THREE PRODUCTIVITY KILLERS ARE:

1. **Distractions:** Constantly checking social media, constantly checking emails, temptations, procrastination, clutter, interruptions from others, multitasking, noise, decision fatigue, overthinking, frequent breaks and micro-management are the most common distractions in the lives of entrepreneurs. In order to control your life, control what you pay attention to. Focus on the task at hand with complete discipline in

order to increase productivity.

2. **Perfectionism:** Often business owners get trapped in their own need to be a perfectionist that hampers their growth & productivity. Perfectionism often leads to 'analysis paralysis' wherein one overanalyses every task and hence delays taking action. To be truly successful, you should focus on progress and excellence instead of perfection.

3. **Lack of Emotional Mastery:** As an entrepreneur, one has to take hard or quick decisions & face events from the space of response instead of reactions. A typical day in the life of an entrepreneur has a series of emotions – fear, confidence, uncertainty, overwhelm, ease, comparison, thrill, stress, happiness, anger and frustration among many others. It is important to know how to process these emotions (instead of repressing or expressing) in order to keep the focus intact. Repressing emotions causes overthinking, negative self-talk and procrastination while expressing it without processing leads to time being

wasted with no clarity on the action plan. Our emotional state has a deep impact on performance & productivity. When we are in peak state, we achieve faster & better.

OVERCOMING THE PRODUCTIVITY KILLERS:

1. **Attention Management:** It is the ability to recognise when the attention is being shifted to unproductive activities instead of the planned tasks at hand. Attention management enables us to deliberately cut off from distractions and create opportunities that support our vision & goals. This can be done by being in the present moment, practicing mindfulness, finding the flow and maximising focus on things that are essential for progress.

2. **Eliminate Time-wasters:** Time is the most important commodity that we have that's non-refundable. We often get engulfed in time wasters such as social media, long redundant conversations, extended breaks, inability to say 'no', lack of clarity or direction, unrealistic deadlines and lack of effective delegation. It is important to identify the time wasters and then eliminate them in order to stay on top of the game.

3. **Focus on Execution:** Prepare an action plan in advance in writing and then schedule your tasks. Keep taking small steps to reach the goal without getting sucked into the trap of perfection. Set high standards but be realistic. Focus on progress and

Multitasking is a myth. Brain focuses on only one thing at a time and so what we really do is shift or switch focus rapidly and this in turn makes us slow and decreases our productivity. Too many stimuli cause confusion, errors and exhaustion.

excellence will follow. Ask for help if need be but make sure to execute the plan. Manage your time effectively, prioritize, set reminders, take actions and stay consistent.

4. Take Breaks for Physical

Movement: As an entrepreneur, one has to be high on energy and hence take breaks for exercise, physical movement and stretching. Exercise releases endorphins that help in relieving stress and feeling good. This in turn, helps in sharper memory, creative flow and better focus. While you are at it, also be mindful of nutrition-intake and avoid over-eating or not eating for longer durations.

5. Quit Multitasking: Multitasking is a myth. Brain focuses on only one thing at a time and so what we really do is shift or switch focus rapidly and this in turn makes us slow and decreases our productivity. Too many stimuli cause confusion, errors and exhaustion. Do one thing at a time and upon completion, move to the next – make this a habit! Also, remember to do the more difficult tasks first to avoid procrastination later.

6. Work in 90-minute

Intervals: There is immense research to confirm that all elite performers are more productive when they work in 90-minute intervals. This helps them be more focused & centred. Our brain uses more energy than any other organ of the body and hence after working in high state for 90 minutes, the brain requires a small break to avoid fatigue, foggy or lack of concentration. This is a great way to enhance productivity. To make the most of these intervals, focus on what you are best at, delegate the other tasks effectively and stop micro-management.

7. Emotional Mastery: Emotional mastery enables an entrepreneur to process the emotions – fear, confidence, uncertainty, overwhelm, ease, comparison, thrill, stress,

happiness, anger and frustration among many others in effective ways. The emotional state has a deep impact on performance & productivity and hence we should train ourselves to master it. Reacting impulsively to people & situations only impairs growth in the long run. The mindset of the team plays the most important role in the success of a business. This can be done through self-awareness, building connections, meaningful conversations, effective communication, giving value, active listening and processing emotions through emotional pattern interruption using a mix of mind-body tools, breathing techniques,

NLP, gratitude or therapy.

Make yourself accountable publicly to increase the motivation so as to push yourself to finish the tasks declared to be done. Being more productive at work isn't rocket science, but it does require us to be more deliberate about how we manage our time.

Drop the excuses, take full responsibility for your success, be mindful and use the tips in order to skyrocket your productivity.

-Dr Chandni Tugnait, MD (A.M) Psychotherapist, Life Alchemist, Coach & Healer, is Founder & Director, Gateway of Healing.

Empowering and upskilling MSMEs with financial literacy

In continuation with its brand ethos 'Zidd Aage Badhne Ki', PayNearby, India's leading branchless banking and digital payments network, has launched "PayNearby University" under its trade app to educate and handhold its retail partners towards a better livelihood and a sustainable life for themselves and their families. Available in 10 regional languages for an engaging learning experience, PayNearby University is designed to empower retailers by utilizing the full potential of the platform and help create a thriving ecosystem for the retail community.

PayNearby was built to educate, engage and push a wide range of assisted financial and digital services including basic banking services like cash withdrawal, domestic remittance, goal-based savings and insurance to the last mile. Today, more than 15+ lakh retailers use the PayNearby platform to service close to 15 crore Indians on a wide range of products and services. The success of the model lies not only in the 10+ lakh transactions that it clocks daily or the monthly GTV of ~5500 crores plus, but in the social reach of the platform across 17,500+ PIN codes in the country,

helping uplift both the retail community and consumers in those areas, thereby helping access to the Government's DBT disbursements in an easy manner. The company's constant commitment has been to empower local retailers who are building the nation ground-up while driving financial inclusion at the last mile, thus creating a digitally forward and financially inclusive India.

Reiterating this commitment is PayNearby University, where retailers can acquire knowledge about the financial product and services the company offers, learn how to use these services, and how to efficiently utilize the platform to earn more. PayNearby University ensures that retailers can upskill themselves and are able to deliver financial products seamlessly to the customers at the last mile. It also trains retailers on the best practices in investments and how to manage their finances better in order to take care of themselves and their families' future. PayNearby University enables bite-sized learning videos which are easy to consume along with financial and insurance consultation and career guidance, in turn, creating more aware, engaged and empowered retailers.



Adarsh Khandelwal

In the present circumstances, each new development and announcement might seem to throw a curveball in your journey to your dream university - and as counselors, we understand your watchword right now needs to be “awareness”. By keeping track of latest developments, you will be able to successfully plan your academic journey and minimize uncertainty.

Vaccine, Visa, and Vista of the Future

The Updated Guide to Getting to University in a Pandemic

The latest notification by the CBSE Board has stated that it is now considering two options for marking Grade 12 students—either the final exams from both Grades 10 and 11 in addition to the Grade 12 internal assignments will be considered, or only Grades 10 and 12 together. Students are awaiting a swift and fair decision, but if you are one of those who are on track to university but stuck due to administrative delays, read on to see what exactly you need to do in the interim.

1) Get Your JAB –

If you are 18 or above, we cannot stress the importance of having your vaccinations done before you enter your destination country. This should be your first priority at the moment, as major schools in the US -over 360 public and private institutions - mandate vaccination before entry to the country. While other popular locations like Canada, the UK, and Australia have not specified this demand, it is probable that they too will deny entry for those who do not carry a WHO-certified vaccination certificate.

At present, the Serum Institute of India's Covishield is the only WHO-approved vaccine in India, and the gap between doses has been extended to 12 weeks. However, states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, and Telangana have reduced this gap to 4-6 weeks for students with foreign university admits and workers who have to travel internationally. They have also allotted priority slots and a dedicated vaccination schedule for these individuals, establishing special portals, passport-linked vaccination confirmation, and other facilities to fast-track the process. According to the Kerala government, approximately 2000 students have already registered for this service and more are to follow suit - we hope to see other States implement this policy as soon as possible, as this is the ideal decision in light of the urgency of the situation.

2) Other Medical Formalities:

The vaccine isn't the only health requirement that needs to be fulfilled for an international student; many countries have specific tests that need to be completed before they approve a Visa, from HPV to Tuberculosis checks. Students need to be in good health before they travel - ensure that these formalities are completed as soon as possible through approved health centers.

3) Your Student Visa:

Without a valid Visa, you will be unable to enter the country you are slated to go to. Once you have all the necessary documents (keep a checklist handy!), you will need to jumpstart the process. The Visa will have certain stipulations for entry; for example, students who are to head to the US need to secure a date



Many universities have degree-specific courses, modules, or preparation material to be completed before matriculation (your formal start date). Ensure that your work on these is not hindered, as these are crucial to understand your classes once you get to university.

to apply for their F1 Visa the moment their i20 Forms are processed. They will need to email the Embassy for this category with the copies of their form attached, even if the date is not initially visible. The F1 Visa does not allow students to enter the country before 30 days from the commencement date of their course.

What does this mean for students who need last-minute vaccinations? The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that is available in the US has a 21-day (3-week) minimum recommended interval between doses. If the student can reach the university 30 days before their course, as per their Visa, and avail of the on-campus vaccine, they would receive the second dose well in time for school to start. It is important to communicate with the university administration and check for quarantine requirements and vaccination policies.

4) Get in Touch with Your School and University – Get the networking bug inside you!

Keep an eye out for updates on the current situation. Write to your university explaining the delay in exam result announcements; they will allow you flexibility provided they know your intent to enroll with them is still high. If there is no

response, request your school administration or counselor to get in touch with the university instead of doing it yourself. The school could send a letter that is followed up by the student, or vice-versa - the school's involvement lends an official understanding to your case, and the school should ideally work in collaboration with the university to request an exemption for your unusual circumstances and explore how to work around the delay in exam results.

5) Polish Your Pre-University Knowledge:

Many universities have degree-specific courses, modules, or preparation material to be completed before matriculation (your formal start date). Ensure that your work on these is not hindered, as these are crucial to understand your classes once you get to university.

Despite everything that is going on, the key 'takeaway' is that you need to plan like you will reach your university in time. For select States (the list is expanding!), a vaccine taken now is eligible for a second dose by the 15th-20th of July at the latest. Even with 2 weeks allotted for recuperation, this leaves students with a comfortable entry date of the first week of August.

As for the Board examination results, some universities, for instance, those in Canada, have already mentioned that these are not mandatory. Last year, the IB Board finals were not conducted, but students were granted admits regardless.

Special measures

Compared to the first bout of the pandemic panic in 2020, global universities are much better prepared this year. No one was expected to report to campus during the first wave, but 2021 has seen the US ready to open its doors for international students. Canada and the UK will likely follow suit and have already established special measures for students from red list countries like India.

During this period rife with ifs and buts, you have to stay prepared - be in touch with Embassies to follow up on your Visa process, confirm your vaccinations, tick all the other boxes for valid entry, and progress in a manner as though it is certain that you are going. Finally, it is important to stay positive - we'd highlight this in a bold, shining gif if we could! - and continue to work on your other commitments alongside your communications with your school, university, and embassy.

-Adarsh Khandelwal, Co. founder, Collegify. ■

Digital media tech startup NewsReach raises \$300K from JITO Angel Network and others

NewsReach, a digital media tech startup, has raised \$300K. The seed funding round was led by existing investor JITO Angel Network in participation with ShuruUp Ventures and FAAD Network. A consortium of angel investors like Ajeet Singh B Khurana, Siddharth Ladsariya, Gopinath Latpate, Sharan Pawan Aggarwal, and Shankha Bannerjee also took part in this funding round.

NewsReach will use the funding for tech innovation, hiring new talents & expansion into multiple states.

Pooja Mehta CIO of JITO Angel Network said, "JITO Angel Network is a

strong believer in helping rural and semi-urban parts of India go digital. With its investment in NewsReach, it furthermore strengthens its hold in the publishing and media sector. We believe that the strong founding team backing the company has the zeal and skillsets to empower small and medium-sized publishers and give them an opportunity to scale."

Founded in 2018 by Darshan Shah and Soniya Kundnani, NewsReach is based in Ahmedabad. NewsReach is creating a news ecosystem 2.0 of original and hyper-local content by empowering the offline local news publishers and reporters to go online. The aim is to

digitize, facilitate and provide a single platform SaaS & Marketplace for the news media landscape.

"We are fortunate to be oversubscribed in this round and have secured the funding required for technology building & expansion. NewsReach is innovating the way content is handled in the traditional news ecosystem. With a proprietary developed content marketplace and online publication system for publishers in a DIY SaaS model, we are democratizing the way news media operated for decades," added Soniya Kundnani. ■



Siddharth Chaturvedi

The evolution in technology has transformed the world far ahead from just a click. Technologies like, face recognition and text-to-speech have made machines smarter than the human. The previous decade witnessed the rise of video content and its application in various sectors, especially education. This decade will take voice technology to another level, especially in education, only to reshape it like never before.

How Innovations in Voice Technology is Reshaping Education

Google reports that **27% of the online global population is using voice search on mobile. Moving into the 4th Industrial age with the innovations in voice technologies, the upcoming generation will be educated with a whole new educational standard.**

The advent of the pandemic and confinement of children has sped up voice technology in education. Teachers are experimenting with different technologies, and voice search tops them all. There are several benefits of voice technology that are profoundly reshaping education globally. It provides easy on-the-go learning, technologies like text-to-speech save time, voice assistants are becoming the new problem solvers and audio mediums like podcasts aid education tremendously.

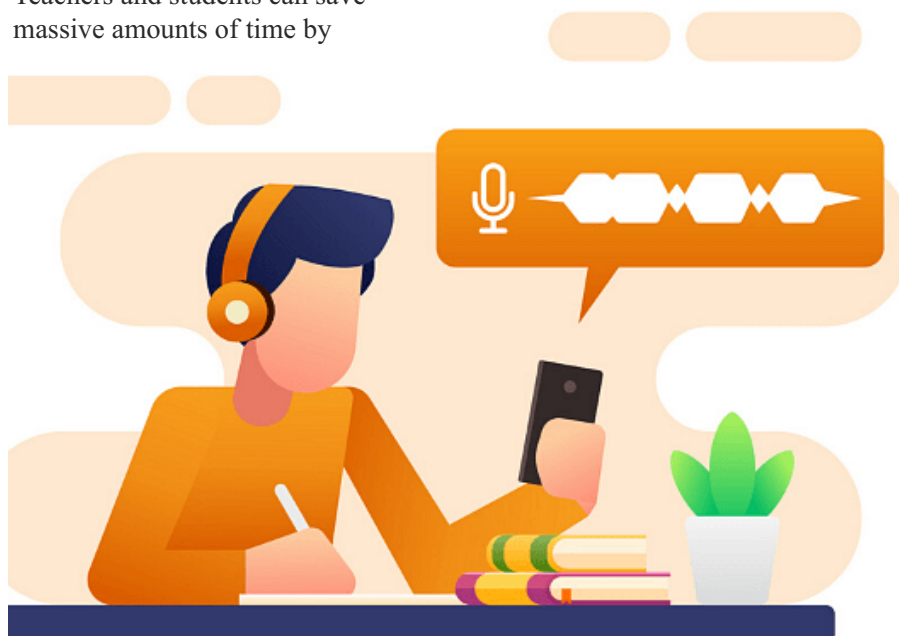
Voice Technology

Voice Technology is reshaping the educational sector entirely and making education even more accessible. It has given the green signal to learning on the go. The foremost advantage of integrating voice technology is learning while indulging in some other chore. For example, if you have a recorded

lecture of your subjects, you can listen to it even while completing your assignment. You can make your notes and listen to the audio at the same time. Even if you had to go back to the point you missed, the audio would not buffer as much as the video. In most cases, voice technology has reshaped a student's problem-solving ability too. Instead of asking their parents, inquisitive students can conduct a voice search, and their queries are solved instantly. This phenomenon saves their time and has made students independent problem solvers. It has also been found fruitful in the case of teachers where several teachers direct the common questions to voice assistants and focus on the more important ones which require detailed explanation. Teachers and students can save massive amounts of time by

innovative technologies such as text to speech when one talks of saving time. Such technology can help you listen a textual material that is aided by a computerised voice. For instance, you can read a document or a PDF file even without reading it aloud, and the computer reads the file for you.

The most widespread usage of voice technologies has been found in learning languages. Linguists have constantly been using the audio medium to teach different languages. If seen from an Indian context, advancement in voice technologies can aid the learning of vernaculars and facilitate education in vernacular languages. As diverse as the country is, the course curriculum sums up to



We live in the days when we ask Alexa to switch lights off, Siri to call friends and ask Google Assistant for directions. In such a case, the relevance of audio and voice devices have multiplied. According to Adobe Analytics, users of smart speakers usually ask for music 70% of the time, about the weather 64% of the time, and fun questions 53%.

be equally diverse. Advancements in voice technologies like podcasts, audiobooks, audio lectures, and pronunciation assignments are reshaping education in more ways than we ever thought.

Audio and Voice devices

We live in the days when we ask Alexa to switch lights off, Siri to call friends and ask Google Assistant for directions. In such a case, the relevance of audio and voice devices



have multiplied. According to Adobe Analytics, users of smart speakers usually ask for music 70% of the time, about the weather 64% of the time, and fun questions 53%. Online searches make up 47%, news comes in at 46%, and direct questions stand at 34%. The survey also found that 31% use voice for smart home commands, 30% for ordering/shopping online (according to voice commerce statistics), 17% for take-out food orders, and 16% for flight and hotel research. Not to forget how these audio assistants are now assisting education.

Voice assistants can help teachers with classroom management, setting timers, reminders and instructing children. It will help students understand more about voice technology and how it can benefit them. Voice technology is reshaping education and giving way to innovation. The older students who have been using voice technology in

the classroom learn to code and create applications for smart speakers. Giving wings the idea of coding for smart speakers, The Amazon Alexa Fellowship supports students studying conversational AI at some selected universities. The initiative aims at preparing the next set of generations to design the future of voice technology. Voice-based teaching can be the latest classroom up-gradation. The students using AI-powered voice assistants can

tomorrow effectively use the latest innovations in their workplaces. Therefore, the advancement in voice technology, starting with the onset of voice assistants, can also create innovative workplaces and corporates. Along similar lines, education material can also be made in the audio format, which paves the way for podcasts. Further, this can be integrated with the learning system for the assistance of the students.

Significant Evolution

Educational podcasts also contribute to reshaping education, where anyone can receive any education with just a tap of the finger. Apart from improving listening skills, podcasts are incredibly convenient in education. With the benefit of time-shifting and learning on the go, podcasts save time for teachers and helping students repeatedly. However, there are few podcasts on the course curriculum, but there are

plenty of education podcasts on skills, right from photography to cooking.

One pertinent issue with voice technology in education is the increasing concern for student's data privacy. Data is the next big thing, and at the same time, data theft is an equally serious crime. However, with technology evolving every day, issues like data privacy can be solved. Voice has always been a building block in communication. The optimisation of voice technology in education will be the most significant technological evolution in the fourth industrial age.

-Siddharth Chaturvedi is Executive Vice President, AISECT Group.

World Bank Grants \$500M to Support India's Informal Workforce, Cope With Pandemic

Severely affected by the pandemic, India on Thursday received massive financial help from World Bank. Issuing a statement, the World Bank Board of Executive Directors said that they have approved a \$500 million program to support India's large informal workforce and create greater flexibility for states to cope with the ongoing pandemic, future climate, and disaster shocks. The programme, which is named Creating a Coordinated and Responsive Indian Social Protection System (CCRISP), builds on the \$1.15 billion Accelerating India's Covid-19 Social Protection Response Program to support schemes under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY).



Nitin Sabharwal

How influencer marketing is casting a Large Shadow on Digital Marketing Strategies for Indian Brands

That Covid has brought upon unprecedented levels of disruption for brands, businesses and individuals can never be overstated. While this disruption has spurred an all-out pivot to a 'digital lifestyle' for individuals, it has the brands also scrambling to keep pace and align their operations as well as marketing and sales with the emerging all-round digital ecosystem. In fact, the increasingly digitalized landscape has proved to be a more convenient and timely meeting point for both companies and end-consumers.

It is no wonder that the Covid-driven increased usage of online delivery and payment services, and higher consumption of OTT, gaming and video entertainment when coupled with surging social media presence of end-consumers have galvanized the advent of influencer marketing as a substantial component in a company's digital marketing strategy. Although influencer marketing has been in vogue for some years now, the recent times have particularly seen sizeable traction casting a shadow on Indian brands and their digital marketing strategies.

Digital transformation inevitable for Indian companies and brands

It is no more a matter of whether brands would undertake digitization but when they would do it. Several surveys and studies have testified to the intent of brands and companies taking the digital route in some ways. According to Dell Technologies Digital Transformation Index, as much as 94.7% of Indian companies had accelerated digital makeover to

some extent with 92.3% of them reporting to have recast their business models last year. Echoing similar sentiments, in another study, more than 50% of companies surveyed had said to have plans to advance their digital transformation exercise by one to three years.

Most sectors taking to Influencer marketing: An easy choice for Indian brands

In the last one and half years, Indian brands across industries and sectors were seen to have taken recourse to influencer marketing in a major way as a part of their digital marketing toolkit. From FMCG to food and nutrition, to beauty and wellness, to fashion and lifestyle, to entertainment to even BFSI companies, to those operating in B2B

space, nearly most sectors and businesses have employed influencer marketing in some measure. Pushed by the Covid-driven financial constraints and mobility restrictions as also the ever-diminishing end-consumer trust in the traditional celebrity endorsement route, it had emerged as a fairly easy choice for Indian brands too. According to a study, 78% of marketing leaders took to influencer marketing in 2020 with about 13% of them engaging in influencer activity for the first-time last year. In a similar vein, according to e-Marketer, 84% of marketers had contemplated launching at least one campaign featuring an influencer. From consumer standpoint, a significant 71% of consumers had reported to



Not so long-ago advertisers were spending millions to get the right brand endorsement from celebs and in return used to talk to audiences of these celebs. With social media creating new homegrown celebs who have huge to very little fan following, endorsement is moving in uncharted territory in the history of brand endorsements.

have made purchases derived from a social media recommendation.

Social media democratizes space: phenomenal rise in number of new influencers

In the recent past during Covid, again due to most Indians having been confined indoors, there has been a phenomenal and near-spontaneous proliferation of new social media influencers in the country offering brands and companies plenty of options while executing their influencer marketing strategy. Virtually overnight, thousands of ordinary people but with experience and expertise on a niche subject became social media influencers and digital opinion leaders on subjects as widely ranging from food, health and fitness to beauty, fashion and lifestyle and several others. Their opinion and advice through their posts on a product or a service quality began to be valued and respected adding to their profile as well as their followers count. While for brands, the roping in of influencers was not only timely, it also was easy on their budget as compared to when working with traditional celebrities while improving ROI and revenues. There is no doubt that the open and democratic nature of social media allowing everyone to vent or share their opinion has allowed the rise and blossoming of these influencers. In addition, the format allowing 24/7 connect, posting of videos, live video sessions and two-way interactive conversations have catalysed the rise of new influencers. In fact, with brands employing influencer marketing, social media has no more remained merely social; it has by all means turned commercial too.

Influencer marketing: the not-so-old-kid in the performance marketing ecosystem

Not so long-ago advertisers were spending millions to get the right brand endorsement from celebs and in return used to talk to audiences of these celebs. With social media creating new homegrown celebs who have huge to very little fan following, endorsement is moving in uncharted territory in the history of brand endorsements. While there have been instances of overnight successes for some brands, many are reeling under peer pressure with no platform out there that helps coordinate, research, deliver & assess measurability as a one-window

Influencers have been quick to adapt to the Covid-induced physical as well as professional environment. Jettisoning outdoor video shoots with heavy equipment and paraphernalia, they decided to make do with simple phone cameras from their homes.

solution. With performance marketing taking over viewability and commission-based models now lining the pockets of influencers, it is becoming an encouraging future platform for brands to leverage the reach and get more active audience with faster result-oriented marketing spends.

Influencers making a quick pivot while lapping up the opportunities

For their part, influencers have been quick to adapt to the Covid-induced physical as well as professional environment. Jettisoning outdoor video shoots with heavy equipment and paraphernalia, they decided to make do with simple phone cameras from their homes. Several of them

also made a relative shift in terms of their content for which they were hitherto known for. For instance, an expert chef popular for his customary Indian cuisines switched to a western cuisine, an entertainer started working on a different genre against his earlier performances. At the same time, those who had been in the business relatively longer, chastened by cancellation of sponsored travel and outdoor event-based programmes, they were more realistic in their negotiations with brands and companies given the slowdown in the larger economy and the resultant paucity of opportunities. As such, this had been a win-win situation for everyone in the business. In fact, during the second wave, a section of influencers

had also emerged as a sort of Covid-related information lifeline for ordinary folks desperately seeking information and medical help. While sharing people's requests with their followers, they also monetized in the

process wherein companies which collected data on people sponsored their posts.

Therefore, even as influencer marketing has become really big for the Indian brands, a more ROI-driven concrete performance-based relationship would evolve in the coming future. Brands would no longer be content with mere impressions and likes but would also expect actual conversion and sales while negotiating their terms and conditions with the influencers. So, mere number of followers would not mean much. Activity and engagement rates would matter more.

-Nitin Sabharwal is Chief Operating Office, India Operations, Optimise Media.



Dr. Sana Moid

A Situation Analysis of M-Wallets Post-Demonetisation for Inclusive Economic Growth

M-wallets emerged as a high-growth and high-profit sector due to its immense potential for value addition, particularly with the aim of making India a cashless economy. Over the past few years, the payment landscape in India, too, has mirrored these developments, with digital payments displaying a robust growth. However, India continues to have one of the lowest use of digital payments globally.

There are three key drivers:

Strong growth in smart phones: The digital payments landscape in India has witnessed unprecedented growth largely driven by increased Smartphone penetration.

Smartphone user base has increased by 60% in the metros, but more importantly, it is the penetration in the tier 2 and 3 areas which is of critical importance.

Adoption of Aadhaar & UPI:

Data availability along with Aadhaar based authentication will allow for seamless adoption of the digital wallet. Initiatives such as Aadhaar, UPI will have a catalytic effect on the industry.

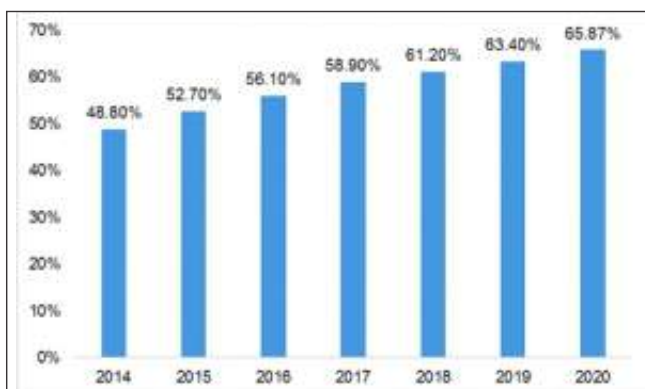
Improved 3G & 4G services: 3G and 4G services are being offered at extremely affordable prices, giving a huge boost to mobile commerce. With 4G becoming more and more affordable, it is expected from smartphone users from tier 2 and 3 regions to adopt digital wallets.

Demonetization, mobile wallets and digital India

Until now, digital disconnect has been a major roadblock in India, as many have preferred transacting in cash instead of making use of bank transactions and plastic money. With demonetization in effect, several digital payment solution providers have created different ways for attracting new customers. The result has been positive for mobile wallets like Paytm witnessing 200 percent increase in app download numbers, and Ola Money seeing a 1,500 percent increase in wallet recharges. The vision of connecting Indians through digital media has been further encouraged by demonetisation.

financial services. Since then, the Government has taken many significant steps towards including a major portion of India's population within the umbrella of formal financial services.

Payments are often the first and most used financial services, required by almost 100% of the population. While certain stakeholders have submitted that such an estimation might be misplaced, the Committee believes that ensuring convenient access to a basic transactional account (as a financial service distinct from a savings account), and a robust payment system, can complement the efforts of conventional banking, towards attaining greater financial inclusion.



Source: <https://www.technavio.com/blog/how-demonetization-indian-currency-has-led-increased-use-mobile-wallets>

Current and Future State Of M-Wallet Competition

M-wallet market can be segmented into three broad services – money transfers from wallet to wallet, bank to wallet and vice versa which accounts for 38 per cent share followed

Why Digital?

Financial inclusion is one of the foremost policy challenges facing India today. As of 2014, approximately 53% of India's population had access to formal

by recharge and bill payments for mobile, DTH, landline, electricity and other such services (31 per cent share) and the remaining share of 31 per cent captured by online

Based on current developments, it is safe to say that mobile wallets will soon be a self-reliant omnipresent ecosystem. In the near future, mobile wallets will be used to engage with the customer by the marketers and digital businesses. With addition of the value-added services that go beyond just payment, experts believe that mobile wallets will become a new marketing channel.

shopping, hotel/travel/movie ticket reservations, online food order, payment of insurance premium, recharging metro rail card and others.

Companies such as One97 Communications Ltd. (Paytm), MobiKwik etc., are investing in advertisements to promote mobile wallet concept across the country. In 2014, Northern and Western regions of India accounted for maximum number of mobile wallet users as well as transactions across the country.

Demonization Effect on Electronic Payment System

Indian economy in the present scenario is witnessing presence of a strong retail payments framework in the country and perhaps even better than some of them in terms of the variety and efficiency. Various types of payment instruments that exist to meet the requirements of different users in different circumstances – bank accounts, cheques, debit and credit cards, prepaid payment instruments, etc. Various systems to meet the remittance requirements of users depending upon their time criticality and cost sensitivity – National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT), Immediate Payment Service (IMPS), Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) and recently Unified Payments Interface.

UPI vs Mobile Wallets? Here's why everyone has got this wrong

People are confused with Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with an end-user app. UPI is an infrastructure on top of which end-user apps can build and implement the features offered by UPI.

The benefits of using a mobile wallet are multi-fold. One does not have to haggle for change, nor worry about a trip to a nearby ATM to withdraw cash. It is a secure, convenient and efficient way to pay for things without having to carry multiple

credit or debit cards or even wads of cash and coins. Mobile wallet adoption in India has risen significantly in the last couple of years as smartphones and mobile internet have become an inseparable part of our daily lives.

Managerial Implications and Way forward

Based on current developments, it is safe to say that mobile wallets will soon be a self-reliant omnipresent ecosystem. In the near future, mobile wallets will be used to engage with the customer by the marketers and digital businesses. With addition of the value-added services that go beyond just payment, experts believe that mobile wallets will become a new marketing channel.

Irrespective of the market status of these mobile wallets, marketers should take advantage of the emerging opportunities for creating a borrowed presence on their customers' mobile devices.

The value offer of a mobile wallet is not about the payment, but the value-added services that can be offered across a mobile-enabled environment. No one wants to be left behind in the race of accumulating 'customer' and in a competitive environment, all the players are coming out with attractive offers and discounts. The question here is, in the name of customer acquisition/retention, is this strategy justifiable or long-lasting?

Requirement of Increasing

Awareness: M-wallet services across the country faces a major issue of lack of awareness regarding their benefits and usage. Majority are still hesitant in using m-wallet because of security and safety issues.

Introduction of Low Priced Smart Phones: Since some m-wallets are compatible with operating systems like IOS (Apple) which are expensive and not everyone can

afford them. To tackle this problem, mobile phone companies should introduce low priced cell phones in the market which can be bought by all the customers, as the ultimate goal of m-wallet is to improve financial inclusion in the country.

Increased Limit of Transaction Amount: Limited amount can be transacted or transferred through m-wallets in a month which hinders the Indian m-wallet market. M-wallet companies should increase the limit of number of transaction and transaction amount even in the case of basic account.

Need for Transparency in Regulatory Policy: The regulatory policy of m-wallet industry is quite cumbersome and involves inflexible and complicated terms and conditions which make it difficult for companies to decide whether their product need RBI approval or not. Crystal clear policies and a common regulatory body for all m-wallets (closed, semi-closed etc) are required.

Need for Relaxation of RBI's Policy: The RBI licensing regime is discouraging mobile wallet growth in the country. The present system allows only e-transfer of money and approves semi-closed pre-paid instrument issuance while it does not allow "cash out" from the semi-closed wallet.

Mobile money hence is not the result of demonetization, but has taken off following the historical move of Indian government of removing Rs500 and Rs1,000 notes from circulation. Prevention of corruption and the spread of black money, stopping terror funding, and the creation of a cashless society were the main objectives of the demonetization measure.

-Dr. Sana Moid is teaching in Amity Business School, Amity University, Lucknow Campus.



Faizan Ayubi



Hemant Mann



Udit Verma

Helping Small Businesses



Trackier Provides Right Digital Tools for Specific Needs

Attracting consumers in a crowded marketplace is a challenge particularly for small businesses that have limited marketing and advertising budgets. Startups often resort to traditional ways of neighborhood advertising such as print ads in local papers, pamphlets or blind calling. However, in an age where an overwhelming number of consumers can be found online, an effective digital marketing strategy becomes indispensable for businesses.

For small businesses who cannot afford the high costs of television advertising or radio jingles, digital advertising is all the more useful and cost-effective. In fact, with COVID 19 pushing most small and medium businesses to go digital, the demand for cost-effective and trackable marketing tools has surged over the past year. ASHRM study says that around 62% of small businesses had experienced a decrease in revenue since the start of COVID-19. This downslide has further boosted the need for dedicated marketing and advertising strategies to build customer base and generate adequate cash flow.

Pandemic or no pandemic, marketing is all about raising brand awareness and building a pipeline of qualified leads that would turn into sales. Less visibility and insufficient resources pose challenges for small businesses to get the word out. Nonetheless, there are some key strategies that can help scale

up the small business's marketing efforts. Making digital marketing performance based is one such critical strategy that has gained momentum in recent times. This

is where performance marketing software Trackier is playing a vital role particularly for small businesses to optimize their marketing budgets and get value for every rupee they invest in online advertising.

How Trackier helps?

Provide a trackable performance marketing platform: Businesses, particularly small ones are increasingly realizing that performance marketing is much cost friendly and result driven as compared to conventional display advertising. It allows brands to pay for their ads only when a tangible action is achieved. Trackier's Performance Marketing Platform enables businesses to create, automate, measure and optimize all their marketing campaigns, publishers, and advertisers, creatives and conversions in one place. With Trackier support, businesses know where each

of their penny invested in online advertising is going and whether it is yielding any positive traffic. Moreover, our conversion-based pricing model rather than a click-based one gives our clients better ROI and value for money. Its 'SmartOptimise' feature also offers one of the faster reporting systems in the industry for marketers to view their KPIs in real time. Our solutions not only help marketers optimize their campaigns, but also protect them from affiliate fraud. Importantly, Trackier provides a complete AdTech solution kit on a single platform and rids them of the need to hire different solutions or softwares to meet diverse performance tracking needs.

Connects companies with right advertisers & affiliates: For any small business, affiliate marketing is a subtle yet viable strategy to raise brand awareness, increase consumer outreach and build a loyal clientele without breaking the bank. With low upfront costs, affiliate marketing helps a firm build trust through influencers' association and ultimately help in driving traffic to the company's site. Be it Instagrammers with large following or bloggers with wide readership or YouTubers with a huge subscriber base, affiliating with the right influencers enables brands improve their visibility, attract a steady stream of consumers and convert leads into sales. Trackier works closely with businesses on this front in two main ways: developing partnerships with complementary businesses, services or

Founded in 2016 by three young Indian techies, Trackier is a SAAS based Performance Marketing Platform that enables businesses to create, automate, measure, and optimize their Marketing Campaigns, Publishers and Advertisers, Creatives, and Conversions in one place. In brief, Trackier offers an automated solution to multiple needs of advertisers all in a single platform.

products, and services or starting one's own affiliate program.

Provide companies with uninterrupted customer support: Trackier guides the companies to have a top-of-the-line customer service so that the marketing efforts yield desired results. Usually, a majority of customer reviews are based on how customers are treated by the customer service team. Therefore, close attention is given on good reviews that would ultimately help establish trust and confidence with the customers. Good customer support is especially important in pandemic times. In the time of crisis, it becomes extremely important for companies to inform their customers about how they're responding to the coronavirus by sending out email updates or posting regularly on social media; reassurance is must.

Provide businesses with an extensively scalable platform: The buzzword in the technology industry is scalability.

Building on a reliable, securely connected, and scalable communications platform is crucial to provide a consistently excellent customer experience. Businesses rely on Trackier as they need reliable communications provider that ensure industry compliance, work round the clock and has a wide network.

Providing companies with an extensive scalable platform helps them maintain agility and speed, letting them stay competitive.

Why Is It Important To Market During Covid-19?

For smaller players, it is always important to continue and improve their marketing efforts, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has served to change consumer behavior for good. The pandemic has not only pulled a large number of 'first time' consumers to the e-commerce space, it has also pushed a large number of consumers to make their buying decisions through online channels. Capturing the digital mind space and doing it with an effective and trackable strategy is therefore the need of the hour for small businesses. It is

also vital to use tools like data analytics to learn more about the target audience. This would prepare businesses for success post-coronavirus.

About Trackier

Founded in 2016 by three young Indian techies, Trackier is a SAAS based Performance Marketing Platform that enables businesses to create, automate, measure, and optimize their Marketing Campaigns, Publishers and Advertisers, Creatives, and Conversions in one place. In brief, Trackier offers an automated solution to multiple needs of advertisers all in a single platform.

The company's foundation was laid by three young tech students at the Delhi Technical University who came together to establish vNative, a platform that enabled businesses to place native ads on websites. Later, when these young techies decided to take a formal entrepreneurial leap, their idea metamorphosized into Trackier.

Interestingly, all three co-founders – Faizan Ayubi, Udit Verma, Hemant Mann -started a web service company during their second year of college, which gave them a strong foundation for a Tech company. Later, when they realized the latent opportunity of launching India's first indigenous Performance Marketing Software, they bootstrapped the organization and established Trackier. When they launched Trackier, the founders found that the currently available softwares in India were too costly and they provided conventional software. Realizing the need to create a more dynamic, customisable and radical solution for the Ad-Tech sector, they built Trackier which revolutionised the market by pioneering the concept of Conversion Based Pricing.

In a short span of time, Trackier has emerged as an innovation leader in the Ad-Tech space, filling in a number of gaps in what users want from an Ideal Performance Marketing Software. Building a scalable, robust, and customizable platform like few others, Trackier has succeeded in creating a strong space for itself in the Indian Ad-Tech sector.

About the founders

Faizon Ayubi, CEO & Co-Founder, Trackier, is a young techie entrepreneur specialising in SAAS Product development, Faizan Ayubi leads the young SAAS based performance marketing company Trackier from the front as its CEO. Under his executional leadership, the Indian tech organization has scaled impressive heights and has established a niche for itself in a short span of time in a globally competitive marketplace.

Hemant Mann, Co-Founder and CTO Trackier. His love for technology and passion for solving problems gives Hemant a constant penchant to find innovative technological solutions to address the challenges of the Ad-Tech industry. As the Technology leader of Trackier, a SAAS based performance marketing solutions provider, Hemant leads a team of young techies towards constantly improving and upgrading the solutions his company provides to the Ad-Tech sector.

Udit Verma, CMO, Co-founder of Trackier, is a technology expert with a penchant for developing unique tech-enabled solutions for businesses, Udit Verma is co-founder of Trackier, a SAAS based performance marketing platform that allows brands effectively manage and track their online ad campaigns.

At a young age, Udit has already founded two tech-based ventures and has mastered an array of specialist abilities in business management including advertising, marketing, brand development, business development as well as operations management.



C K Patel

Scientific Agriculture Practices can Drive Global Demand of Indian Cotton

Cotton continues to enjoy a pre-eminent and the most favoured fibre status for the textile industry globally as well as in India. It is an immensely important crop for the sustainable livelihood of the Indian cotton farming community. Presently, ~50 to 60 million people depend on cotton cultivation, marketing, processing and exports for their livelihood across India. In the last few years, the cultivation of cotton has been steadily declining globally and the world cotton farming experienced dramatic developments in 2020/21 due to an unprecedented pressure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While India is one of the largest producers of cotton in the world, Persistent adoption of unsustainable agricultural practices for the largely water-intensive crop, extensive use of fertilizers and pesticides as well as genetic modification has posed a significant challenge that needs immediate attention. There is still a gap in the yield level of cotton obtained in India vs. the global

average. This means, higher land usage, but a lower income for farmers. Today less than 10 % of cotton is grown in a way that actively protects farmer's economic growth and the environment. The latest trend suggests that the textile industry is becoming increasingly sensitive in choosing sustainable fibres to drive their textile supply chains since the outbreak of Covid-19. Hence, the buoyancy for a revival of Indian cotton farming is now driven by sustainable cultivation.



Cotton crop fields

Global scenario of cotton production and consumption

As per the report of the United States Department of Agriculture, the global 2020/21 cottonfarming is down 6.5 percent from the previous year to 114.1 million bales. The farmers of major cotton-producing countries (India, China, United States, Brazil, and Pakistan) are facing a challenge to compete with their counterparts both in terms of

per hectare yield as well as produce. Adverse weather, an infestation of pink bollworm in cotton crop, lower prices, higher labour cost and policy uncertainty all contributed to the sharp decline. Additionally, the decreased synthetic fibre prices driven by substantially lower oil prices placed huge competitive pressure on world cotton markets. Normally, India produces up to ~ 3.5 crore bales of cotton, whereas China produces ~3.25, USA produces 2.5 crore bales followed by Brazil and

Pakistan which produces ~1.5 and 0.65 crore bales respectively.

Although the US and Brazil are major exporters of cotton, the production in both countries has been declining for two consecutive years resulting in

inefficiency to support the global import demand and the high price of cotton.

In terms of cotton consumption, Asian countries dominate the global market. Cotton consumption in China is around 4.75 to 5 crore bales which are higher than other countries of the globe whereas Pakistan's cotton consumption is 1.35 crore bales. In recent years, strong growth of the spinning and textile industry has spurred the consumption of

cotton in Bangladesh and Viet Nam. Bangladesh requires 90 lakhs to 1 crore bales of cotton and Vietnam needs 75 to 80 lakh bales. Due to their proximity to India, all these Asian countries import a substantial quantity of cotton from India. If we talk about the situation in India, the consumption of cotton is increasing here. Due to the phenomenal growth of the domestic textile industry in the last two decades along with the Indian spinning industry, the country has become one of the largest consumers of cotton i.e., about 23%

production. The country has the largest area under cotton cultivation which is about 41% of the world area under cotton cultivation between 12.5 million hectares to 13.0 million hectares. The crop is mainly produced in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Odisha.



Netafim India's agronomical support to the Cotton farmer

scientific farming techniques. Promotion of environmentally sustainable practices for the mass-produced cash crop along with the scientific and egalitarian application of water, effective use of fertilizers and pesticides will help the Indian farmers to achieve sustainable growth in cotton cultivation. Studies have proved that the adoption of suitable technology such as micro-irrigation in cotton farming helps in reducing input cost and increases income by increasing the number of crops they grow. The benefits include an increase in the water use efficiency up to 80-90% owing to reduced water requirement, about 20% less consumption of electricity per hectare and up to 70- 80% increase in fertilizer use efficiency which translates into significant cost savings. Controlled application of water and fertilizer has resulted in increasing the productivity of the crops up to 50%. All these boost farmer income levels by more than Normal”.

Besides the economic benefits, the technology boasts of a slew of social and environmental advantages as well. Since Indian farmers are receptive to take up any technology that brings certainty to their life and leads to an increase in income level, drip irrigation in cotton farming needs extensive propagation. The backbone of the success of micro-irrigation implementation in cotton cultivation remains in the awareness generation campaigns and effective training amongst farmers.

-C K Patel is AGM, Agronomy & Marketing, Netafim India. ■

Modernization of India's cotton production—including the adoption of BT varieties—propelled India to the top among cotton-producing countries. Government policies such as giving greater thrusts to Research and Development in cotton encouraging the use of

quality seeds and pesticides by providing subsidies for such inputs and price support measures have also contributed to changing the cotton scenario in India.

Even with the impressive statistics of Indian cotton farming, the productivity per hectare has not reached its full potential over the years. Persistent adoption of unsustainable agricultural practices for the largely water-intensive crop, extensive use of fertilizers and pesticides as well as genetic modification has posed a significant challenge that needs immediate attention. There is still a gap in the yield level of cotton obtained in India vs. the global average. This means, higher land usage, but a lower income for farmers.

Agronomy & Marketing, Netafim India said, “To turn around the prevailing scenario, it is imperative to make farmers aware of healthier cotton practices and adaptation of

of world cotton consumption.

The brighter spot for cotton farmer globally

The global acreage for cotton has been constant since the last few years. As the world economy recovers from the severe 2020 downturn, global cotton consumption is expected to grow by 4.1 percent in the 2021-22 season, substantially above the long-term average rate of 1.7 percent, according to the US department of agriculture (USDA). World cotton production is projected to grow 1.5% p.a. to reach almost 30 Mt in 2029. This growth will come from an expansion of the cotton area (0.5% p.a.) as well as growth in average global yields (1% p.a.), suggest OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2020-2029.

Indian cotton farming: At a glance

India is one of the largest producers of cotton in the world accounting for about 26% of the world cotton



Cotton farmer in Gujarat.



Farooq Adam

How Technology Impacts the Omnichannel Experience for Indian Consumers?

Considering the pace at which modern technologies are developed and adopted, if growing Indian organizations are not disrupting the market, it is likely that they are being disrupted by their competitors. It has become important for brands to evaluate the value of technology adoption and accordingly invest in emerging technologies. Moreover, the COVID pandemic has accelerated the process of digital adoption to the extent that customers now prefer buying most of their essentials and non-essentials online.

In response to the change in customer behaviour, brands are now ensuring that their products are available to online customers on multiple online channels. This does not mean that physical stores are no longer integral to the brand strategy. In fact, these multiple online channels are now powered directly through the brand's physical stores. This has led brands to invest in technology-backed omnichannel experience which in turn will help them earn customer loyalty

Tech enabled omnichannel retail involves creating a consistent customer experience across mobile commerce, websites, social media, advertisements, and physical stores. The new-age Indian customer wants to purchase products from different platforms - all effortlessly and seamlessly. They are comfortable shopping directly from social media or in-store and expect retailers to adapt to newer technologies. But

what makes a successful omnichannel retailer? How does technology impact the omnichannel experience for Indian consumers? Here are the top omnichannel trends that have been impacted positively via technology to provide a better customer experience:

Home Shopping Giving Rise to Video Shopping:

The pandemic changed how brands do business, choosing solutions that empower them with the right tools to add to their selling arsenal while retaining the traditional experience. Customers today prefer videos and are comfortable with video

applications. Showcasing your products via videos is an interesting way to capture interest and delight your audience. In India, this is especially coming to use in boutique and designer fashion stores. Shoppable videos or in-video commerce is quickly becoming the simplest way for consumers to shop and for brands to streamline sales

Social Commerce:

Website navigation needs to be crystal clear, easy-to-follow and least ambiguous as it impacts conversions, bounce rates and sales. A visitor should be able to tour around and find exactly what he/she is looking



Loyal customers will expect brands to know exactly what they like, after all, we all know the frustration of receiving irrelevant advertisements. Hyper-personalization or one-to-one marketing is a form of traditional personalization where one utilizes real-time data and artificial intelligence (AI), to display to their customers only relevant and specially curated content, products, or services.

Contactless payment has already become a part of our new normal, it is a secure payment method using a debit or credit card, smartcard, or another payment device by using RFID technology and near-field communication. Share cart/payment links directly to a phone using QR codes or WhatsApp to have a contactless, safe, and fast checkout experience.

for without getting lost. In addition to this, social commerce is also on the rise. Not only should the brand's products be available seamlessly across stores, websites, and 3P marketplaces, they should also be easily available on social platforms like Facebook Marketplace and Instagram Marketplace. WhatsApp commerce in India is another channel that will soon become part of the new normal

Using AI and big data to enable Hyper localization + Hyper Personalization -

Loyal customers will expect brands to know exactly what they like, after all, we all know the frustration of receiving irrelevant advertisements. Hyper-personalization or one-to-one marketing is a form of traditional personalization where one utilizes real-time data and artificial intelligence (AI), to display to their customers only relevant and specially curated content, products, or services. Brands will need to provide their customers with a curated collection of exactly what is available in the store next door based on their past purchase behaviors

The use of Augmented Reality (AR) in-store and online to help shoppers shop better:

Augmented reality not only helps the customer get a feel of the product, but it can also help online retailers reduce their cost of returns drastically by providing an engaging

'try-before-you-buy' digital experience. New age innovative AR solutions allow customers to visualize the products they wish to purchase in real-time, from the comfort of their homes or workspaces

Using RFID technology and near-field communication technology for self-checkouts in stores/contactless payments -

Contactless payment has already become a part of our new normal, it is a secure payment method using a debit or credit card, smartcard, or another payment device by using RFID technology and near-field communication. Share cart/payment links directly to a phone using QR codes or WhatsApp to have a contactless, safe, and fast checkout experience. Omnichannel providers offer merchants a secure omnichannel payment processing platform that supports in-store, online and mobile payments. This empowers them to power sales today and in the future.

All in all, to ensure smooth operations, the Indian retail industry needs a sensible approach to the integration of technology into an omnichannel strategy for an enhanced customer experience and improved ROI. Brands that will consider customer experience an essential factor of corporate strategy will draw substantial value from omnichannel retailing. That being said, setting up an omnichannel

solution can also become easier with the right strategy in place.

To conclude, I hope the above omnichannel retail tech 2.0 trends will help you implement an effective omnichannel strategy with your e-commerce setup. Omnichannel is undeniably growing and is the most effective strategy for reaching customers. However, selling on multiple channels can be complex and often ends up being a roadblock to brands. Brands should carefully choose solutions that allow them to manage their omnichannel business from a single platform and gives them the flexibility to scale based on their goals.

About Farooq Adam

Farooq Adam is a co-founder of Fynd, India's leading omnichannel platform (a Reliance backed company) looks after the overall strategic vision at Fynd and heads product, engineering, and culture. An IIT-Bombay graduate, Farooq worked for four years with the leading analytics company Opera Solutions in New York, prior to starting Fynd in 2012.

Founded by Farooq Adam, Harsh Shah, and Sreeraman MG, Fynd (A Reliance backed startup) is India's biggest omnichannel platform helping retail businesses accelerate growth. The O2O company directly sources products across various categories, from the most prominent brands in the country. Its integrated system allows for the speedy delivery and a complete assurance of product quality. Fynd has built a suite of products that help brands facilitate their omnichannel business.



Amit Bhatia

Digitisation:

A Great Enabler in Credit Flows to MSMEs

MSMEs are vital for the sustainable economic development of the country providing livelihood to millions, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. They are the engines of incessant growth, contributing nearly 30% to India's GDP, producing a wide range of products, from simple consumer goods to high-precision sophisticated finished products. SMEs are responsible for enhancing competitiveness, entrepreneurship and the establishment of an effective innovation system. They create employment prospects in all geographic regions and sectors, especially for low-skilled workforce and allow opportunities for skills growth.

M SMEs have a starring role to play in the government's plan to solve problems related to poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. Policymakers realise this importance and are prioritising the development of a resilient MSME sector with many fiscal measures being directed towards them. An agile and dynamic MSME sector is imperative for India to realise its aspirations of becoming a global powerhouse.

Traditionally, MSMEs have been beset with many challenges, including inadequate credit, infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory constraints, scarcity of raw materials, restricted access to new markets (including overseas) and competition from larger corporates. Cash-starved small businesses struggle to reach

their full potential as they are unable to invest in technology, upskill workers or enhance infrastructure, as risk-averse banks often require MSMEs to furnish sufficient collateral, which first-time entrepreneurs normally don't have, hampering credit disbursal.

The Struggle

Enterprises who were already reeling from the economic slowdown in 2019 had the wind taken out of their sails by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A severe liquidity crunch and poor demand due to multiple lockdowns has resulted in many small businesses struggling with business continuity while others have closed down temporarily or permanently.

The standard approach to funding MSMEs is based on rigid credit appraisal systems that revolve around financials, paper intensive manual and cumbersome processes,



Digitisation

hierarchical decision making, inflexible systems and limited credit products. Credit risk challenges are driven by information asymmetry, resulting in high cost SME risk assessments, limiting lending to SMEs. These inefficiencies were further exacerbated by the lockdown and funding flowed to a trickle in mid-2020, notably due to the following factors;

- General sentiment that MSMEs are the first to be affected and last to recover from any crisis
- Declining collateral values, further reducing lendable amounts
- Uncertainty on which sectors would bounce back and which would face a prolonged impact
- Single channel led (Direct sales agents) paper-heavy acquisition model, which couldn't function
- Shortage of processing staff at the lenders end, due to connectivity and infrastructure issues as a result of Work from Home (WFH) situation

Government Measures

Not all was gloom and doom though. There were some silver linings too. Notable among them, were a slew of government measures aimed at providing a stimulus to kick-start the economy. The moratorium on loan repayments for a period of six months offered the much-needed breather to entrepreneurs. The Rs 3 lakh crore ECLGS scheme which provided a 100% guarantee to financial institutions for disbursing collateral-free emergency working capital loans was a shot in the arm and kick-started the revival process. Regulatory constraints faced by these businesses including high entry barriers (difficulty in procuring operating licenses, permits); unfriendly tax codes; unfavorable exit terms (resolving bankruptcy and insolvency issues, asset sales); all began to ease. A major positive outcome has been the accelerated pace of digitisation,

forced upon lenders, to ensure business continuity and cope with staff shortages due to WFH situations. The pandemic has created the need for seamless, secure and remote services and lenders needed to redefine their business models by embracing digital transformation. Aided by fintechs who offer a vast array of services right from prospecting suitable customers to post disbursement servicing, banks have become more agile. There has been a transformation in the way that customers can apply for credit, the manner in which those applications are now processed and how overall life cycle is managed. Digitisation, improved connectivity, analytics and big data have all combined to ease the flow of credit.

- Omni channel distribution capabilities of lenders have cut out the middleman, reducing costs and time for credit.
- Online applications, e-KYC and ability of lenders to pull out financial and other public records have replaced lengthy manual processes
- Digital processing provides faster and more accurate insights into the customer's business.
- Assessment is cash-flow based rather than relying on outdated financial papers
- Artificial-Intelligence-based scoring models and improved fraud detection capabilities are leading to quick and confident decision making
- Early warning systems help identify signs of stress to take quick remedial measure

Rebuild the Financial Architecture

The recently revised Co-Lending Model (CLM) between banks and NBFCs aims to improve the flow of credit to unserved and underserved

A major positive outcome has been the accelerated pace of digitisation, forced upon lenders, to ensure business continuity and cope with staff shortages due to WFH situations. The pandemic has created the need for seamless, secure and remote services and lenders needed to redefine their business models by embracing digital transformation.

sections of the economy and to make funds available to borrowers at an affordable cost. For the micro segment who were wholly dependent on NBFCs for funding, this is a lifeline since NBFC funding had dried up of late. With NBFCs being the point of interface with the customer, banks can capitalise on the greater reach, operational abilities, and technical capabilities of NBFCs who ensure better last-mile connectivity. This is a win-win situation for everyone as banks can serve larger markets without incurring high operational costs, NBFCs get access to liquidity and financial backing and the customer gets the much needed funding at reduced interest rates.

While MSMEs are disproportionately affected by pandemic-related shocks, it is also a fact that they are flexible and can quickly adapt to new environments such as the one created by COVID-19. How well the MSMEs can cope with changed realities is largely dependent on the support extended by lenders and governments. There is a need to rebuild the financial architecture of how small businesses access finance and the many green shoots that have emerged in this space bodes well for the future. The ultimate goal is to lower financing costs and increase the formalisation of the economy, such that the MSME sector becomes self-sustainable and resilient in the post-pandemic world.

-Amit Bhatia is Managing Director & Head of International Private bank, Deutsche Bank India.



Dr. Rajiv Mathur

Emerging Technology Aiding Start-ups to Face Real-World Challenges

The penetration of the Internet, proliferation of smart devices and burgeoning IT/ITes industry has provided a fillip to emerging technology over the past few years. The leveraging of technology to boost business outcomes has become the key metric for determining the successes of organisations worldwide. Start-ups, too, have followed suit and catalysed innovation and digital transformation to solve real-world problems through emerging technology.

Technology has unlocked umpteen benefits for companies and start-ups- savings of time and resources, automation of manual processes and thereby accelerating tasks, offering uniquely tailored solutions in line with customers' preferences, building reach and recall among stakeholders, fostering digital transformation and innovation and much more. Technology has also broadened entrepreneurs' horizons and enabled them to tap uncharted territories as their next avenues for growth.

The start-ups are leveraging emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Big Data, Blockchain, among others. This suite of next-generation technologies have

redefined how we live, work and play. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is among the dominant technologies that have disrupted businesses. AI mimics human intelligence and executes tasks accordingly, thereby maximising productivity and efficiency in sectors such as education, retail, healthcare, etc. In the retail sector, AI can improve the quality of customer service calls and boost conversions. AI leads to a personalised and informed stage at every leg of the customer journey that facilitates quick decision-making and course correction in their strategies. Similarly, AI-powered chatbots address customer queries and foster engagement in real-time. Education is another sector where AI has proved to be a boon. The use of AI in e-learning helps instructors



Emerging Technology



The start-ups are leveraging emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Big Data, Blockchain, among others. This suite of next-generation technologies have redefined how we live, work and play.

customise modules according to each student's learning pace and deliver improved outcomes. Start-ups are also using AI to generate precise survey results through geolocation, street maps, etc.

3D technology

According to a Dell report, companies investing in Big Data, cloud and security experience 53% faster growth in revenue than their peers. The explosion of Big Data has necessitated the storing of vital information on one platform for its easy accessibility and management. Cloud Computing technology allows access to all files and documents without any necessity of storing in your system. This technology will enable businesses to access information quickly, saves time and resources and facilitates increased collaboration. It finds utility in automotive, healthcare and hospitality sectors that rely heavily on data.

The advent of 3D technology has enabled the precise mapping of metrics such as interaction, attention, intention to cater to cybersecurity and retail purchase processes. The Augmented Reality has also gained traction in the tourism and retail sectors to maximise customer experience. This technology provides an interactive experience by enhancing objects through computer-generated perceptual information. Augmented Reality has aided real estate and retail sectors through 3D immersive walkthroughs and video

shopping to improve their experience and boost sales during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Entrepreneurs are also betting on the potential of blockchain technology that can revolutionise real estate, banking and fintech, food safety, healthcare and defence industry. Blockchain refers to the decentralised digital ledger that underlies most cryptocurrencies and eliminates the need for a financial intermediary. This technology can speed up the transfer of funds from few days to few seconds and improve efficiency in the banking and financial sectors. Blockchain can also store titles and deeds on its block, thereby serving as a repository of information and usher transparency in real estate. In the food processing sector, blockchain can trace the source of contaminants in food and thereby improve the food safety process.

Technology for social development and inclusive growth

The series of initiatives by the government has also propelled the use of technology. Taking cognisance of the power of AI, the government of India has formulated the National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence in 2018 that aims to harness the technology for social development and inclusive growth with the aim to make India the 'AI Garage of the World.' The National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems aims to implement CPS and

associated technologies to foster translational research and catalyse entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystem development in CPS. It envisages a network of 18 Technology Innovation Hubs (TIHs), 6 Sectoral Application Hubs (SAHs) and 4 Technology Translation Research Parks (TTRPs).

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitisation and witnessed start-ups leveraging a gamut of technologies to develop solutions such as UV sterilisation systems, source-based oxygen concentrators, super protective masks and doorstep delivery of fuel to tackle the pandemic. This trend is foreseen to continue backed by conducive policies, stress on innovation by organisations and cutting-edge research and development efforts. Nevertheless, it is to be remembered that the digital transformation journey entails several challenges; the foremost among them is upskilling and reskilling of the workforce to enable them to stay relevant amid automation. Another challenge is to select the right mix of appropriate technology by aligning it with goals and business outcomes. Here technology should be an enabler and not the end in itself. Also, digitisation is a continuous process and doesn't stop at the mere deployment of technology; it is ever-evolving in tune with the requirements of businesses over time.

The COVID-19 has unlocked the potential of technology to the fullest. The journey of digitisation is arduous but worthwhile in the long run.

-Dr. Rajiv Mathur is Managing Director, The Fuel Delivery. ■



Vinay K Mayer

Micro, Small and Medium businesses, which employ the maximum number of people in the country, are in dire need of the government's help in the form of tax breaks, credit card facilities, and easier access to loans, and so on. MSMEs are also the backbone of the economy and account for over three-fourths of the total employment in the country. In into the mainstream and has announced several initiatives to support them. These include setting up an SME Bank, an e-marketplace for small businesses, and an INR1, 000-crore fund for SMEs. While these initiatives will help the businesses grow and expand their reach, the government should also focus on giving small businesses the right platform and policies to operate.

Relief Measures to Offset Looming Burden of MSMEs

The Government of India introduced several qualitative and quantitative schemes to promote Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The schemes are aimed at providing support to achieve holistic development of the MSME sector and thereby contribute to economic growth and development.

Severe impact of the COVID-19 on economy

India's economy is slowly crumbling away with each passing day due to its limited ability to defend itself against this global pandemic. This economic crisis led the government of India to take several steps to support MSME companies. MSME businesses in India have benefited from several tax exemptions and capital subsidies, as well as concessional financing, easier MUDRA loans and interest-free loans. The government has also introduced a series of insurance schemes to benefit India's MSME sector.

In its attempt to counter this economic crisis, the government has taken the right steps through 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'

The budget 2021-22 included a provision of Rs 15,700 crore for the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME). The schemes included Shishu SEWA Bank, Micro Units Development Refinance Agency (MUDRA) credit support and Grameen Business Loan (GBL).

Support for MSMEs during COVID-19

The government of India and the

Reserve Bank of India are currently outlining their plans for supporting the MSME sector even more. In this regard, several steps are being taken to ensure that MSMEs have a greater say in policy-making. The government is also working on ways to improve access to finance and make getting bank loans easier for MSMEs.

There have been several recent developments, including the following: (i) Reduction in interest rates on loans under priority sector lending (PSL); (ii) Relaxation in the condition of mandatory collateral security for loans under PSL; (iii) Relaxation in the provision for maintenance of ledger accounts and passbooks by sanctioning banks; (iv) Setting up of credit information bureau to share data with other lending institutions and government agencies; and (v) Interest subvention scheme for MSMEs.

Relief to offset financial burden

- INR20k crore (USD 2.6 bn) subordinated debt for stressed MSMEs.
- INR50k crore (USD 6.5 bn) equity infusion for MSMEs with growth potential and viability through Fund of Funds.

- Revised investment limit for MSMEs; additional criteria for turnover added.
- No global tenders for government contracts up to INR200 crore (USD 26 million).
- E-market linkage to be promoted as a replacement of trade fairs and exhibitions.
- MSME dues to be cleared within 45 days.

Does the government have the right approach towards SMEs?

- Initiatives by Ministry of MSME on Covid-19 relief - Government has made interventions like giving loans to SMEs at 0% interest rates, and a provision of Rs. 1 lakh per year for three years for MSMEs having profit of less than Rs. 25 lakhs without any collateral.
- The Ministry of MSME has taken the following initiatives: - Provision of Rs 5,000 crore as credit support to Micro Units Development Refinance Agency (MUDRA). - Launched 4 new schemes for MSMEs under the umbrella scheme "Stand Up India" to promote entrepreneurship and employment among SC/ST/women and youth. - To provide recognition, registration and certification services for MSMEs.
- GST has been amended in many ways to make it more business-friendly. With the new rates, the government has reduced the tax burden on all businesses. A significant change has also been made to how revenue is collected. The government has been lenient toward businesses and has given them more time to comply with the GST.
- The government of India has taken certain steps to make the lives of MSME entrepreneurs easier. Earlier

this year, the government of India announced that it will set up a corpus of INR 4000 crore (INR) for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME). This is for the first time that the Government has earmarked a fund solely dedicated to the MSME sector. Government efforts are being made to encourage the growth of the sector and encourage entrepreneurs, even though it is still facing challenges.

SMEs have been very instrumental in the growth of our economy. Hence, the need of the hour is to help them live on their own feet and work for the betterment of the country.

About Vinay K Mayer

Vinay K Mayer is Director-Marketing Research & Consulting, Asia Research Partners LLP which is a premier independent Asian research network driven by the core values of proficiency and reliability. It aims to be the most sought-after name in Business and Market Intelligence Solutions, and a dynamic team of spirited researchers, consultants, and analysts, reflect its commitment to strategic and insightful information that supports the growth of our clients across industries and geographies.

'Soft Launch' of APAC FinTech Bridge

APAC FinTech Bridge recently announced its 'Soft Launch' during a two-day digital summit from 28-29th July. This is a joint program by The GAIN from India and One Lenz from Australia. The APAC FinTech Bridge aims to be the commercial gateway and community to facilitate commercial deal flow, invest in startups, and drive initiatives across the Asia Pacific region. Some of our government partners include Invest Hong Kong, Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Center, corporate partners include Freshworks, Azul, industry enablers, national fintech associations, investors.

Capital Raising Event

As part of the Digital Summit five startups pitched for investments, these included Whrrl from India, Confirm U from Israel, Xippy from Australia, Prime Keeper from Malaysia, Almond Solutions from India. In the words of Yatir Zaluski, CEO of Confirm U, one of the Israeli startups who pitched for

investment, "APAC Fintech Bridge is a great stage to bring thought leaders, financial institutions, and startups that are working alongside an evolving vibrant ecosystem.

Founder's view

Commenting on the launch, Varad Krishna who is the CEO of The GAIN and a co-founder of APAC FinTech Bridge said, "The APAC FinTech Bridge offers to increase Corporate Startup Engagement" He's been a Serial Entrepreneur later, Co-founded 100 Open Startups, the largest open innovation platform in the world.

Why FinTech

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) states, "India is strongly poised to realize a FinTech sector valuation of USD 150-160 billion by 2025, translating to an incremental value-creation potential of approximately USD 100 billion." It is because of these emerging trends in the FinTech world, we intend to build a FinTech Ecosystem across the Asia Pacific region to realize its potential.



Suhayl Abidi



Dr. Manoj Joshi



Dr. Ashok Kumar

Entrepreneurs' Moment in Specialty Chemicals

Specialty chemical industry in India is currently having its day in the sun. Both domestic consumption and exports are growing at 20% per annum. Entrepreneurs looking for prospects should analyse this industry as it offers multiple advantages to start-ups, such as:

1. Indian specialty chemical industry has largely recovered from Covid-19 setback.
2. India reflects a pulsating specialty chemicals industry producing over 80,000 products.
3. India is world's third largest consumer of polymers; fourth largest producer of agrochemicals and also the sixth principal producer of chemicals.
4. India supplies 16% of world's demand for dyes and dyestuffs.
5. China chemical industry is decreasing- is a big opportunity for India as an alternate producer with exports growing at 20%.
6. China led trade disruption has helped import substitution and exports
7. The Indian market in the past five years has witnessed a growth of 14% ,expecting to reach \$ 70 bn by 2020 and \$100bn. by 2025.

8. Specialty chemicals companies are largely debt free.

9. Contrary to general impression, India's API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient) industry is the world's leader in technology development.

10. Global Contract manufacturing will continue to grow manifold. Global companies are de-risking their supply chain presently dependent on China

11. India has a large professional community of organic chemists, both MSc. and Ph.D. and have deep expertise in chemical synthesis

12. Many Indian companies are world leaders in their respective fields.

Entrepreneur can pursue for opportunities in the specialty chemical space at a low investment, with manufacturing occurring in

batch process. The manufacturing can increase incrementally as demand increases. The success of the Indian pharmaceutical industry is derived from our chemistry expertise in reverse engineering. It is here, India's low manufacturing cost combined with high level of knowhow in chemistry has created a world scale industry. Specialty chemicals target to a very specific end-use application. They are generally sold in smaller quantities compared to commodity chemicals such as methanol. To give an example, India was an importer of mentha oil till about 15 years back. Currently, it has seized 70% of the global demand due to the efforts of Jindal Drugs.

The construction chemicals industry is booming in emerging economies such as Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America. New textile plants are coming up in Asean and African countries. High growth packaged food industry is creating demand for flavours, fragrances, colours etc. with India being globally competitive in these sectors.

With the shrinking industry in chemical sector for various reasons, a market has opened for Indian manufacturers to tap Chinese market as well as other markets vacated by China.



Based on current developments, it is safe to say that mobile wallets will soon be a self-reliant omnipresent ecosystem. In the near future, mobile wallets will be used to engage with the customer by the marketers and digital businesses. With addition of the value-added services that go beyond just payment, experts believe that mobile wallets will become a new marketing channel.

Opportunities for Indian Manufacturers

Because of their differentiated and value-added nature, many specialty product lines enjoy higher sustained profitability levels than commodity products. Extending existing products to new applications can also enhance competitiveness and profit margins. Many specialty chemical producers are actively engaged with customers in R&D and deliver a high level of contracted or in-house technical assistance.

innovation, implementing an effective sales and marketing strategy, and maintaining high levels of regulatory standards clearly separate winners from the crowd in this space.

Globally, the specialty chemicals business is transforming the way pharma sector changed some four decades ago. As more products come out of patent protection and the customer is becoming cost conscious, there would be a greater attractiveness towards generics. India has the appropriate resources with low costs to make the best of this global opportunity.

Global Leaders

Technology licensing is readily available from global R&D giants such as Dow Chemicals, DuPont, Basf and Sumitomo for downstream projects. Technology is also available from Indian institutions such as National Chemical Laboratory. In addition, SMEs in countries like South Korea and Taiwan are keen to join with Indian companies to exploit world markets. Funding for proven business models is readily forthcoming from Private Equity and API industry alone is expected to attract USD3-4 billion in the next two years.

Many companies are global leaders in their respective fields. For example, Aarti Industries is globally ranked 1st to 4th in 75% of its portfolio. Fine Organics is one leading global producer in food additive industry and one of the five global players in plastic additive industry. Galaxy Surfactants has a market share of 60% in India, 70% in Egypt and 40% in Africa. Vinati Organics has 65% global market for isobutyl benzene, 55% for ATBS and 70% for isobutylene. All these companies started modestly and have grown to be globally competitive due to their continuous attention to cost and customer service. You could be the next.

Technology licensing is readily available from global R&D giants such as Dow Chemicals, DuPont, Basf and Sumitomo for downstream projects. Technology is also available from Indian institutions such as National Chemical Laboratory. In addition, SMEs in countries like South Korea and Taiwan are keen to join with Indian companies to exploit world markets.

Factors that are generally supportive of long-term demand for specialty chemical industry growth include rising standards of living in developing regions, a shift to higher performing products, specific application requirements in industrial production, and shifting global or country-specific energy, health, or environmental policies or regulations that require specialty chemical attributes. However, the safety and measures on environment must not be compromised.

USA happens to be the principal market for Chinese chemical exports. The trade war between the two countries has led to USA looking for other exporters and India is one potential benefactor from this. US chemical companies have large manufacturing bases in China. They are looking at shifting the bases to other countries in Asia. Even many Chinese chemical companies are importing from India, products which it was exporting till recent years.

Ability to scale up, offering differentiated products through

About the Authors

Suhayl Abidi

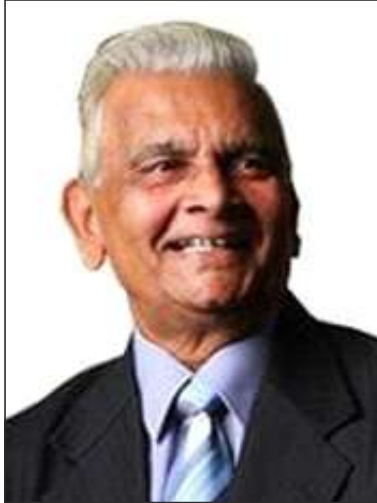
Suhayl Abidi, is an MBA from FMS Delhi and Information Management from Leeds Polytechnic, UK. He is a consultant with *Centre for VUCA Studies*, Amity University & a practitioner in Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management with 27+ years of corporate experience including Reliance Industries, Essar and Piramal Group. He has co-authored two books “The VUCA Company”, “The VUCA Learner” and several articles.

Prof (Dr) Manoj Joshi

Dr. Manoj Joshi is a Fellow Institution of Engineers, Professor of Strategy, Director, *Centre for VUCA Studies*, Amity University, with 30+ years of experience in industry & research. He has authored 40+ articles, co-authored three books “The VUCA Company”, “The VUCA Learner”, “Technology Business Incubators” and is also on the Editorial Board of several international refereed Journals.

Prof (Dr) Ashok Kumar

Dr. Ashok Kumar is Ph.D with professional qualifications in Business Management & Demography with advanced training in Management at Ashorne Hill College of Management, UK and has authored books and papers. He is a consultant with Centre for VUCA Studies, Amity University and has 47 years of experience as Professor of IIM Indore, Professor at Amity University and GM in SAIL.



Pradip Dave

22 Molecules Coming Off Patent by 2030

Generic Agrochemicals in India Poised for a Bonanza

Globally, India is the 4th largest producer of agrochemicals after the United States, Japan and China and has emerged as the 13th largest exporter of pesticides. It is a major hub of generic pesticides production, which leverages, among other things, the fact that branded molecules, exclusive to the producing companies, are open for larger use after the patent period of 20 years. The fact that 22 such molecules are going to come out of their patent period will substantially expand the offerings of the Indian companies to people at home and abroad alike and may help fetch extra revenue.

What is a patent and why is it given?

Any innovator has its exclusive right over the research and technology developed and when opened for use, gets rewarded by the way of giving the Patent right. Patent is a form of intellectual property (IP) giving the innovator/inventor a legal right over their invention/innovation for a limited period and forbids others to use it. It is to honour the innovative technology; to recover the innovation cost; and to get a return on investment in the development of the technology. As the benefit of innovation, patent period is availed by the entire world, not as a charity but as a protection from others copying the innovation during that period. The Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement requires the member countries to make patents available for any inventions, whether products or processes, in all fields of technology without discrimination, subject to the normal tests of novelty, inventiveness and industrial

applicability. The Article 27.1 of the agreement also requires that patents be available and patent rights enjoyed without discrimination as to the place of invention and whether products are imported or locally produced.

Benefits of off-patent molecules

Agrochemical sector is deeply interested in the molecules which are going to be off-patented as it creates an opportunity for its own commercial development. Pesticide companies, especially in developing countries, wait for generic active ingredient molecules as it provides huge opportunities for generic manufacturers to provide agrochemicals at a reasonable affordable price for farmers to protect their yield from pests and disease. Moreover, generic pesticides are same in quality of patented pesticides, effectively affordable in price for Indian and global farmers, are Based on the same active substances and work in the same way in the crop as the patented pesticide,

but cost much less. Both patented and generic pesticides are subject to the same approval process from the competent authority for registration, a generic pesticide is as safe and effective as the original patented pesticide and hence popular in farming community.

Generic molecules break the monopoly of a company who had their patent right for about 20 years without any competitor. In fact, monopoly for such a long period is dangerous as there is no control over the price of the product and it can go up as high as the manufacturer wishes. Since the last many years, it has been observed that innovators are becoming more possessive and monopolistic. The generic producers constitute about 30% of the global pesticide industry, mainly due to increase in the number of off-patented molecules and decline in new active ingredients, both of which favour generic pesticides industry which has seen a faster growth as compared to the inventor (R&D based) companies recently.



Current Market Size and Trend

It has been observed that 30-40% of the off patent active ingredients are taken up by the generic manufacturers. Of these, those for fungicides and insecticides are more preferred to herbicides. About 60-70% of off patented molecules are not adopted due to their limited market, difficulty to manufacture and unavailability of key intermediates. The original inventor/developer works against the generic competitors by controlling the supply of intermediates and raw material and it is easier for them if the intermediates and raw material are rare. It has been observed that entry of generic competitors result in the fall in price, to overcome this R&D based companies develop cheaper and more efficient process of manufacture for those molecules which are going to be off patented. As the manufacturing process can also be patented, the strategy of R&D based companies help them to protect their active ingredients. In this situation, despite the active ingredient being off-patent, generic companies can be prevented from producing the same by the alternative process, if the new alternative manufacturing process for it is still protected. Many generic companies are now moving towards developing alternative manufacturing processes for generic active ingredients. Developing an alternative process for production of Isoproturon without using isocyanate intermediates is one such example.

Challenges for Generics

Although generics give great opportunities but also pose challenges before the manufacturers in terms of how quickly they bring products into the market; how to offer their products in a crowded and noisy market where already this is

available under a big brand; how to provide cost-effective and effective generics which is profitable as well, and such. A generic manufacturer always faces these challenges by the time they enthusiastically wait for off-patented molecules. The inventors, in order to continue their monopoly, always try to pose obstacles before the generic manufacturers by adopting the following strategies:

1. Market Segmentation
2. Synthesis/ technology/ manufacturing know-how
3. Registration Data protection (RDP)
4. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

What is going off patent by 2030

There are around 22 pesticide active ingredients which are about to get out of their IPR period in the next ten years i.e. between 2021 and 2030.

These are Bixafen, Chlorantraniliprole, Cyantraniliprole, Fenpyrazamine, Flubendiamide, Fluopicolide, Fluopyram, Fluxapyroxad, Isopyrazam, Mandipropamid, Penflufen, Penthiopyrad, Pinoxaden, Pyriofenone, Pyroxsulam, Sedaxane, Thiencarbazone-methyl, Valifenalate, Benzovindiflupyr, Sulfoxaflor, Saflufenacil, and Aminopyralid. The demand for some of these off patented technical grade molecules in the global market is expected to increase drastically. It is expected that the market size of these products will cross over US\$ 4.1 billion by 2026. The reason is that the products like Chlorantraniliprole, Fluopyram, Fluxapyroxad, Cyantraniliprole, Bixafen, Sedaxane, Fenpyrazamine and Flupicolide have a huge market. Industry players will have an opportunity, specifically in regulated markets, to choose the generic according to the demand of the

market where so many products are becoming off-patent. In India, these generic products will provide enormous growth to generic manufacturers and also to formulators who are directly or indirectly affected while the products are under IPR.

A word of caution

The increased regulatory pressure in the EU and now increasingly elsewhere is (in general) putting additional pressure on off-patent chemistry to a greater extent than patented chemistry. Companies need to take into account more than just sales. Beside factors such as chemistry and regulatory, a key element for any off-patent company post 2020 is a “comprehensive” portfolio of advanced chemistry in order to compete with the “solutions focused” multinationals that can offer a “bundled” seed, trait and crop protection package.

About Pradip Dave

Pradip Dave, a Science graduate from Mumbai University, who started his career in the year 1965, is an Entrepreneur - Chairman of AIMCO Pesticides Limited, an agrochemical company engaged in the field of Agrochemicals manufacturing, Formulation and marketing for last more than 45 years. The company is one of the major players in Insecticides, Fungicides & Herbicides in India and exports its products to major markets in the world.

Pradip is President of Pesticides Manufacturers & Formulators Association of India (PMFAI), a national level Association representing Agrochemical Industry in India with more than 200 companies as its members.

Premium Consumer Electronic Products

ZOOOK on its Way to Break Stereotypes

Conceptualized in the early 2000's in France, ZOOOK entered India in 2013 with a vision that life is too short to be boring. ZOOOK is a game-changer in the world of technology and has the power to give any personal space an instant makeover. ZOOOK specializes in high-end designing, manufacturing and marketing innovative consumer electronic products. The company aims to democratize premium consumer electronic products clubbed with lively designs that match the lifestyle of millennial and Gen Z.

With a distinctive product range, ZOOOK is already on its way to break stereotypes, open doors and explore the fantastic. The company has a strong brand presence across

online and offline trade channels - retail stores, direct dealer channels, and e-commerce websites across the world. ZOOOK envisions emerging as a key player in the audio domain with most innovative products and best-in-class after sales service.

Achin Gupta, a young individual with an entrepreneurial mindset, is Country Head-India, ZOOOK. His journey with the brand began in 2014, since when he has spearheaded ZOOOK's overall operations in India. Having a clear understanding of the Indian market landscape and the consumer mindset, Gupta soon strived to fill the existing gaps. Under his leadership, the brand has introduced in India a bouquet of innovative products across segments like audio, gaming, and accessories etc, which were majorly not available for the average Indian consumer.

Achin Gupta in an email interaction with SME WORLD.

What is the basic concept behind ZOOOK India?

ZOOOK is a French company that thrives on innovation and being industry first as its brand

ethos. The brand has introduced many innovative products across varied verticals. Focussed on developing a blend of technology and lifestyle products, the brand shares an



Achin Gupta

ZOOOK's varied product range makes it a one-of-its kind holistic audio and lifestyle brand that does not fall under one particular category. As mentioned, we are into completely distinct domains like audios, gaming, smart home etc. The focus though has been to establish it as a formidable player in the audio segment, wherein market size is ascertained separately in different segments such as wireless audio, pro audio equipment, speakers etc.

amazing relationship with the Indian consumers. India is currently amongst the youngest countries in the world that are developing at a very fast pace, and the kind of acceptance we have received in India is simply incredible.

Please share Product category.

Our product range is from across varied domains, including audio, gaming headsets & accessories, PC accessories, mobile accessories and

completely distinct domains like audios, gaming, smart home etc. The focus though has been to establish it as a formidable player in the audio segment, wherein market size is ascertained separately in different segments such as wireless audio, pro audio equipment, speakers etc.

What's the Growth rate?

We have maintained a steady growth throughout our journey, barring the interim impact of the pandemic,

brand works through innovation on a need based proposition, and not driven merely by competition.

What market share does ZOOOK hold in the audio segment?

Audio in itself is a very vast category, comprising scores of domains like Bluetooth speakers, TWS ear buds, sound bar etc. ZOOOK is primarily focussing on Party Speakers and we are glad to lead the chart.

What is your product range focus for the future?

We plan to diversify our product portfolio across all segments, but our immediate focus is on a few key areas like Audio, IoT Smart home, Car audio and also wearables.

Which product line in ZOOOK's portfolio is performing better?

While ZOOOK tops the chart when it comes to party speakers, it is also a leader in other verticals, especially Car audio, gaming and Smart home. The catalyst for a consistent performance across these niche segments is innovation and an industry first approach.



car audio, among others. Being a lifestyle brand, ZOOOK also offers a wide range of devices that help people transform their homes into smart homes. These devices include smart lighting solutions such as smart WiFibulb & motion sensor light and smart WiFi Plugs.

What is the current market size in India?

ZOOOK's varied product range makes it a one-of-its kind holistic audio and lifestyle brand that does not fall under one particular category. As mentioned, we are into

which brought businesses worldwide to a sudden halt. Thankfully we were able to take the right steps at the right time to cover for losses and we are registering a Year on Year growth rate of 30%.

How much market share do you intend to capture by 2022?

It has been stated earlier that our expansive product range refrains us from confining in one definite category, so we are more focussed on maintaining our play area and continue our steady growth journey in niche category. ZOOOK as a

Any impact of pandemic in the business?

Following the outbreak of the pandemic we felt a massive jolt that brought all operations to a screeching halt. While the supply chain was disrupted, procurement of raw material became a daunting task. However, we managed to take the right decisions in the right time so the impact is not a lot. Since we have recovered well, the overall impact is nullified.



Amrinder Singh



E-Commerce Launchpad for Innovative FMCG Products

E-commerce is reshaping the retail market in India and globally. Impelled by the lockdown due to COVID-19, several FMCG companies used the e-commerce platforms to launch products. This was even before the products were made available in the traditional retail shops. The stringent restrictions and slow consumption forced the businesses to halt the production units during the lockdown. But, the ecommerce platform brought a ray of hope for the brands giving a push to their sales.

Companies across verticals have been able to successfully promote their brands through online first or the online-only strategy for the niche or premium brands, which is usually missing in offline retail shops. To the extent that, some reports suggest that companies were able to generate up to 8% of sales via e-commerce. More than 100 brands launched their products online first during the last year's Amazon Prime Day sale.

What makes online a laboratory for new launches?

Unlike traditional retail, a basic eCommerce store can be up and running in just a few clicks at a much lower cost. An eCommerce channel allows companies to avoid many

companies sequentially build their business as the sales grow. At the same time, use of a mix of online touchpoints to engage multiple audiences at once helps the companies reach out to new customers, serving the niche markets. A study suggests that the e-commerce industry in India has been growing exponentially and is expected to become the second largest e-commerce market in the world by 2034, surpassing the US market.³ Shoppers commonly resort to online research to compare brands or prices or even check inventories. Brands making a digital presence ensure that the potential customers find their products easily. One added advantage of selling products online is that it allows companies to collect, measure, and analyze customer data. This data helps companies get constant feedback and actionable



large, upfront investments that traditional retail can incur, like an inventory, physical storefront, or payroll. An online store lets

insights, pushing them to further innovate for better customer experience.

The pandemic compelled the consumers to alter their preferences, but now both the companies and consumers like the change. Keeping up with the trend, the companies are gearing up for more launches in coming future. Major FMCG giants are prepared to launch their products exclusively in the online market. For this many online exclusive innovations are in the pipeline.

Selling Direct-to-Consumer with Ecommerce

More than ever, consumers today start their buying journey by making purchases online. This has given a big boost to the direct-to-consumer selling models. For companies, one major advantage of this model is that brands can reach their customers anytime, anywhere. Prior to the internet era, brands largely relied on resellers to reach their customers. Websites enable the brands to broaden their market globally. Ecommerce helps the companies sustain their market segments as the physical stores are harder to maintain. One very important aspect of D2C model is the company's direct engagement with the customer. Shoppers love when the brands directly interact with them and this helps further expand the opportunities for the brands.

The pandemic compelled the consumers to alter their preferences, but now both the companies and consumers like the change. Keeping up with the trend, the companies are gearing up for more launches in coming future. Major FMCG giants are prepared to launch their products exclusively in the online market. For this many online exclusive innovations are in the pipeline. In the offline format, it takes time for the seasonal products, especially, to expand and reach the target group. However, the online channel squeezes the time for such launches.

About Amrinder Singh

Amrinder Singh, Director, Bonn Group of Industries, started his journey at a young age of 25 when he got into the Bonn Group's family business with a vision aimed at transforming the three-decade-old bakery into a facilitator of healthy eating habits. Armed with a degree in Business Science from Essex University and a Master's in Global Business Marketing from Regent's Business School, England, Amrinder brought a fresh youthful perspective to the veteran organization.

Amrinder is responsible for a youth oriented portfolio comprising of La Americana Biscuits, La Americana Gourmet and the La Americana Burger QSR Chain. Each of these products was launched after extensive market and consumer preference analysis. His focus on whole food grains for BONN's line of bread, biscuits and cakes have won him many accolades in culinary circles across the industry. He strongly believes in "Constant product innovation" and in adapting to the evolving tastes of consumers in their quest for a greener & healthier lifestyle.

Not only has Amrinder managed to consolidate Bonn's existing markets but has also been instrumental in the Group's expansion to the rest of the country's markets. Leading business paper, the Economic Times has honored Amrinder's contributions with a 'Business Knight Award' for his exemplary leadership, business acumen and meticulous innovations.

Digital media tech startup NewsReach raises \$300K from JITO Angel Network and others

NewsReach, a digital media tech startup, has raised \$300K. The seed funding round was led by existing investor JITO Angel Network in participation with ShuruUp Ventures and FAAD Network. A consortium of angel investors like Ajeet Singh B Khurana, Siddharth Ladsariya, Gopinath Latpate, Sharan Pawan Aggarwal, and Shankha Bannerjee also took part in this funding round.

NewsReach will use the funding for tech innovation, hiring new talents & expansion into multiple states.

Pooja Mehta CIO of JITO Angel Network said, "JITO Angel Network is a strong believer in helping rural and semi-urban parts of India go digital. With its investment in NewsReach, it furthermore strengthens its hold in the publishing and media sector. We believe that the strong founding team backing the company has the zeal and skillsets to empower small and medium-sized publishers and give them an opportunity to scale."

Founded in 2018 by Darshan Shah and Soniya Kundnani, NewsReach is based in Ahmedabad. NewsReach is creating a news ecosystem 2.0 of original and hyper-local content by empowering the offline local news publishers and reporters to go online. The aim is to digitize, facilitate and provide a single platform SaaS & Marketplace for the news media landscape.

"We are fortunate to be oversubscribed in this round and have secured the funding required for technology building & expansion. NewsReach is innovating the way content is handled in the traditional news ecosystem. With a proprietary developed content marketplace and online publication system for publishers in a DIY SaaS model, we are democratizing the way news media operated for decades," added Soniya Kundnani.



Nikky Gupta

How 2020 Changed Public Relations for Good

The year 2020 witnessed an unprecedented disruption across industries, inducing the need to adapt, change and equip fast enough to address the changing needs of the time. From education, to healthcare to pharma, the changes unleashed by the impact of the pandemic have brought about paradigm shifts in multiple industries. Public Relations industry has been no different.

On the one hand, the crisis forced organizations to have a re-look at their communication strategies and marketing budgets. On the other hand, it underlined the need for effective crisis and reputation management. With a major shift towards the digital medium, the emergence of virtual events as mainstream and with shrinking of the traditional media space, the pandemic has ushered in long lasting changes in the way communication strategies are planned and executed.

Evidently, public relations industry has been compelled to execute the new ideas and strategies and establish new practices to fulfill their mandates. Many of these changes are here to stay for good, even after the pandemic subsides.

Towards a more integrated communications approach

A shift towards more integrated marketing and communication strategies has been a major change

brought about by the pandemic. A number of factors such as expansion of the new (digital) media space, shrinking of advertising budgets and the need to create a cohesive long term communication strategies has led to the emergence of PR as an important communication element. Despite gaining prominence over the past two decades, PR had continued to be relegated to a secondary position by many organizations with advertising getting a lion's share of attention. However, post the pandemic as marketing budgets were slashed, more companies realized the cost effectiveness of PR and its long term benefits. Organizations are today assiduously crafting communication campaigns that consciously integrate all approaches including marketing, advertising, PR and digital media outreach. The constant need to manage their image, handle crisis communications in times of a global crisis and create a positive brand identity through

Public relations industry has been compelled to execute the new ideas and strategies and establish new practices to fulfill their mandates. Many of these changes are here to stay for good, even after the pandemic subsides.



Every crisis also comes with its share of opportunities. The Covid-19 crisis has spurred a churning for new ideas and approaches in the PR industry. With the conventional newspaper space witnessing an unprecedented change and dependence increasing on digital media, PR agencies have overhauled and redefined their media strategies.

multiple channels has further engendered this shift.

Corporate Communication teams are also remodeling themselves to look at marketing as a more integrated approach, setting definitive and different achievable from different communication strategies. Clearly, Public Relations has today become integral to the overall communication approaches of organizations across industries.

Digital and social media channels gain prominence

Another marked shift brought about by the pandemic has been a greater shift towards the digital and social media channels. With consistently increasing online viewership, the influence of digital media has grown manifold and organizations today cannot afford to overlook the importance of these channels. Even as traditional media continues to be crucial, companies today are increasingly demanding dedicated strategies to use digital media for greater audience outreach.

PR agencies are responding to this shift by diversifying their product bouquets. They can no longer satisfy

their clients by just catering to the traditional media. Digital and social media have become critical elements of PR strategies. Naturally, agencies are today offering a wider service portfolio to their customers including media management, crisis communication and social and digital media strategies.

Virtual events become a norm

Press conferences, events, product launches, panel discussions and expert conferences are critical elements of media engagement strategies of organizations. However, the pandemic has forced most of these physical events to shift to the online mode. With virtual events becoming a norm, rather than an exception, we need clearer and well-defined PR strategies today to leverage these events for media visibility. This also presents a new challenge for PR professionals in terms of the restructuring of event plans to deal with technological and communication logistics and to get all participants their share of time and substance in a virtual meet.

Many companies have realized that

while virtual events and launches may not be as attractive and glamorous as physical ones, they are highly cost effective. Even after the pandemic subsides, the industry will continue to conduct a mix of physical and virtual events.

New strategies to ensure visibility

Every crisis also comes with its share of opportunities. The Covid-19 crisis has spurred a churning for new ideas and approaches in the PR industry. With the conventional newspaper space witnessing an unprecedented change and dependence increasing on digital media, PR agencies have overhauled and redefined their media strategies. Dedicated digital media plans, separate social media strategies and a consistent monitoring of new trends in this space are going to define the future. The use of Bigdata, Artificial intelligence and other technological advancements will redefine the industry practices in 2021.

-Nikky Gupta is Co-founder and Director, Teamwork Communications Group.



Ola Electric begins India's EV Revolution. Opens reservation for Ola Scooter

Ola Electric kicked off India's EV revolution by opening up reservations for its much awaited and highly anticipated electric scooter.

Consumers can now reserve their Ola Scooter on olaelectric.com by paying a refundable deposit of Rs. 499. Those who reserve now will get priority delivery.

The Ola Scooter delivers a revolutionary scooter experience with class leading speed, unprecedented range, the biggest boot space as well as advanced

technology that make it the best scooter customers can buy. It will be priced aggressively to make it widely accessible. Ola will reveal the features and price in the coming days.



“India's EV revolution begins today as we open reservations for our electric scooter, the first in our range of upcoming EVs. With its incredible performance, technology and design along with aggressive pricing, it will help accelerate the transition to sustainable mobility. India has the opportunity and potential to become the world leader in EVs and at Ola, we are proud to lead this charge,” said Bhavish Aggarwal, Chairman & Group CEO, Ola.



CICU emphasises Punjab MSMEs to adopt digitisation

In a bid to make Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) adopt digitalisation, the Chamber of Industrial & Commercial Undertaking (CICU) in collaboration with SAP, held a webinar themed “Global Bharat Movement for MSMEs of Punjab”.

Speaking on the occasion, S Upkar Singh Ahuja, President, CICU asserted that MSMEs in Punjab are slowly getting back to normal post the second wave of the pandemic and it is important for them to adopt digitalisation in order to ensure business continuity and stay relevant.

"Therefore, we are bringing the Global Bharat movement along with SAP for the local MSMEs of Punjab

to ensure that businesses leverage technology in order to grow their skills, adopt new technologies and become globally competitive," he added.

S B Singh, Joint Secretary, CICU said as we witness a digital revolution with businesses evolving rapidly by adopting new-age technologies, there is a growing need for Indian MSMEs to go digital in order to stay relevant and compete in the changing business environment.

"The movement will work towards empowering the local MSMEs to become globally competitive by providing them access to the global marketplace, digitally skilling their workforce and technology to

transform their business processes," he said.

Krishan Kumar, Assistant Director, MSME-Development Institute, Ludhiana emphasized the importance of digital transformation, while Agnishwar Majumder, Regional Manager, SAP India Pvt. Ltd formally launched the Global Bharat Program for MSMEs.

Thanoj Madankesari Senior VP sales Merino Service briefed about the services being provided by Merino Service.

During the webinar, Jayanandan Puthanvedu Director, Corporate Systems, Utopia Global shared his experience as a satisfied customer of services of SAP. ■

Dun & Bradstreet Recognises Corporate India's Leading Performers

Dun & Bradstreet, a leading global provider of B2B data, insights, and AI-driven platforms, honoured the torchbearers among Indian corporates at its annual 'Corporate Awards 2021.' The awards were virtually presented across 30+ categories (including Oil & Gas, Banks, Auto Components, Textiles, Telecom). Companies were selected using Dun & Bradstreet's proprietary data, based on several parameters such as total income, profitability and market capitalization.

The event also witnessed the unveiling of the 21st edition of Dun & Bradstreet's annual publication 'India's Top 500 Companies 2021'-an endeavour to recognize corporate India's leading companies from various sectors, including private and public sector enterprises. The theme for this year was "Laying the Foundations for an ESG-Ready

Corporate India" reflecting the increasing importance of ESG (Environmental Social & Governance) programs to measure long-term value and business resiliency.

Avinash Gupta, Managing Director & CEO - India, Dun & Bradstreet said, "India's Top 500 Companies represent the driving force of the Indian economy and contribute to a significant 16% of India's GDP, nearly 45% of the country's foreign exchange earnings and around 23% of its gross tax revenues. Over the past two decades, while the Indian economy grew by around 14 times, the Top 500 Companies have reported more than 16-fold rise in aggregate revenue and a 29-times expansion in market capitalization over the same period. 127 companies have consistently featured in all editions of the publication since its inception in 1997." ■

World Bank Grants \$500 Million to Support India's Informal Workforce, Cope With Pandemic

Severely affected by the pandemic, India on Thursday received massive financial help from World Bank. Issuing a statement, the World Bank Board of Executive Directors said that they have approved a \$500 million program to support India's large informal workforce and create greater flexibility for states to cope with the ongoing pandemic, future climate, and disaster shocks.

The programme, which is named Creating a Coordinated and Responsive Indian Social Protection System (CCRISP), builds on the \$1.15 billion Accelerating India's Covid-19 Social Protection Response Program to support schemes under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY). ■