



Public Relations needs Empirical Public Relations

Perhaps, one city that represents the rapid transformation of our economy is Gurgaon, a sleepy hamlet to a bustling metropolis within a span of a couple of decades. Called the “millennium city” but plagued with 20th century infrastructure issues. Sounds familiar? In a similar vein, the need for Public Relations has transformed over the last couple of decades; from a proxy for a “free advert” to possibly playing a central role in building corporate credibility. However, the profession itself is plagued with an image problem, often quoted as the “Dark Side” and practitioners referred to as “Spin Doctors” and their role often limited to generating positive publicity!

Public Relations today needs Empirical Public Relations more than anything else if it has to remain relevant to corporate reputation.

As practitioners are aware, paradigm shifts in economic, social, political and technological behavior are afoot, altering the fundamentals of Public Relations. India is at the locus of many of these changes. As one of the most dynamic economies, these shifts and their impact is felt more profoundly here than in any other market. The Indian public relations industry requires nuanced understanding of the complex challenges and opportunities it faces.

I strongly feel that the industry must adopt Empirical Public Relations: public relations rooted in the science of public opinion.

What's that? Empirical Public Relations demonstrates how campaigns move the needle by applying research-based actionable insights at each phase, working from baseline stakeholder perception, through communications developed and tested to maximise effectiveness, to monitoring and evaluating its impact on business.

Practitioners agree that applied insights result in impact than traditional, reflexive approaches and clearly that is the way to go as 89% of clients say they are more comfortable with research-based recommendations. Why? Because they are operating in a hypercompetitive marketplace, their issues are no longer local but global, the digital mediums have changed their operating landscape and they need to show a demonstrable impact on business, not just ROI on spent. This is their New Normal.

However, a crucial gap currently prevents the industry from applying science to its practice: agencies are waiting for clients to ask for it while clients are waiting for agencies to propose it. So will this impasse continue? Perhaps not, as clients say they are ready to pay the premium for insights-based campaigns. It's really now for the service providers to demonstrate that they have both the ability and the willingness to building science-based public relations programme.

Much as Empirical Public Relations will change the way campaigns are priced and paid for, addressing the human capital challenge will require a revised model of compensation, reward and recognition to attract and retain first-class talent.

Simultaneously, communications firms will have to make strategic investments in technology, both to communicate most effectively in an ever-accelerating, ever more-global digital world, as well as to improve business efficiencies.

As Public Relations leads with demonstrative business impact, the industry will increasingly earn a place at the table with the C-Suite, a perspective which will lead to more impactful campaigns. This positive feedback loop will benefit the industry, service providers and business partners.

About Ashwani

Ashwani Singla, Founding Managing Partner

His two decades of experience has seen him counsel and advise MNCs, Indian enterprises and the emerging Indian MNCs across a widerange of sectors. He has been a strategist for leading political parties in India and in the South-East Asia. He was the 'campaign strategist' for the BJP for the 2014 General Elections.



About Constellar

Constellar, the Astrum (www.astrum.in) blog is the new avatar of Ashwani's personal blog Reputare. While continuing to explore and prompt a dialogue on the subject of reputation in all the sphere, Constellar has an expanded scope to guest contributors and thought leaders. As the headline suggests, we will endeavor to bring insights and new thinking in the development of professional reputation management in India.