

Date: 30.6.2021

Publication: Adgully.com

## [Going forward, online media & traditional media will be a merged entity: Nikhil Bharadwaj](#)

4 Minutes to Read

Jun 30, 2021 | Ganapathy Viswanathan



As part of the build up to Adgully's first PR summit – IMAGEXX 2021 – we present the valuable insights provided by our esteemed jury panel comprising the leading names from the country's PR and Corporate Communications field.

In the last 10 years, PR has taken a different dimension, especially after the entry of social media and the rapid shift to digital, especially in the pandemic period. However, at the same time the industry has been

facing stiff challenges, moreover client expectations has also increased, with more emphasis being given to digital and online reputation management. The industry has undergone a radical shift and the current times have pushed the industry to change gears.

In this interaction with Adgully, **Nikhil Bharadwaj, Head - Corporate Communications, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance**, envisages a future where the mobile phone will be everything for consumers – magazine, newspaper, social media, etc. – and hence, PR of tomorrow too will also be in consumers' hands.

**The transition to digital is happening at an accelerated pace. Going forward, what will be the role of digital in PR and how brands and agencies will adapt to this in the new normal?**

The consumption of news online is increasing with each passing day. Earlier, we relied on reading newspapers every morning to know what happened the day before. However, now we are getting news on the go as it happens from multiple news websites. People also refer to social media platforms like Twitter, where they follow various known personalities or news platforms of their interest and get updates on them every minute. Another interesting thing to note is that various media publication houses have suddenly turned their interest to online and are creating digital properties for pushing news online. Large publications have started online platforms specific to various sectors/ beats like Human Resources, BFSI, Technology, etc. These platforms have become much larger of late as they garner attention of those belonging to that specific sector and also because the news published on these platforms may or may not appear in print media.

Hence, I believe that digital is very crucial going forward as we see online playing a good complimentary role today for traditional PR medium such as print and it will only keep growing. At the end of the day, with the help of technology and the world becoming smaller, news is something that is consumed almost every minute. Today, there are apps like Inshorts, Dailyhunt, which have made news in a more consumable format as per your interest. Hence, it is something which brands certainly need to keep a track of. In fact, a lot of brands are tracking their online news presence vis-à-vis their competition to ensure that PR metrics are not just limited to print, but online as well, primarily because the reach of online is almost unlimited and so is its shelf life, unlike a traditional platform like print.

**AI and technology will be the game changer in the coming years, especially in the area of data. What are your views on this and how are agencies and brands gearing up to face this new challenge?**

I believe that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has a long way to go and a lot needs to be done in order for it to be a game changer for the industry. Currently, news tracking platforms use AI and ML for tracking and analysis. Crawlers are being used effectively to understand whether the target website is carrying news of a particular organisation or not. However, tracking and analysing the news in Print media still requires manual intervention on where exactly the article is positioned, images within the article, mention of the company name within the story, calculating CCM, etc., and then formulas and algorithms come into the picture. Image recognition softwares are helping with this, but they are limited to English language and few commonly spoken Indian languages. It is yet to expand to the entire gamut of languages of our country, which are important to know the reach of a brand in 'Bharat', that is, the semi-urban and rural parts of the country.

So, the journey as an industry in terms of leveraging AI has started, but it will take some time to for us to garner ample data, the insights of which can transform how we work and tap the target audience. In the long run, I see the emergence of PRTech companies, wherein tracking/analysis agencies with the help of technology will be able to give a live update of where your brand stands vis-à-vis your competition at, say 11 am today, and tell you from where your references are coming in. It's already being done on the social media front for online reputation management, where agencies constantly track your presence and take care of customer queries. This will soon happen in the PR industry too.

**PR has evolved a lot in the last 10 years and is still evolving. How does the road ahead look like and what are some of the new trends that we will notice in the PR industry in the next 5 years?**

The road ahead and the concept for the PR industry – which was, is and will always remain important – is what value you can offer to the readers of your target group or your target publication. Everybody talks about the relationship between a journalist and the PR industry. I feel that as long as you're able to offer something of value to the readers of the publication, you'll always share a good rapport with the journalists and will always be amongst the companies with a good PR presence. Things go wrong when you are self-conceited as a brand and focus only on your brand and offerings. Instead, I feel a brand should further the cause

of the industry that it's a part of, like for us it's spreading awareness about insurance and products readers must know about. We need to work in conjunction with journalists, talk about what they want us to talk about, be bold, talk out of our comfort zone, if it is to put forward the right stand for your brand and industry both.

Content is and will always remain the king in the PR industry. Authentic and the right content on the right platform will win the battle for you and you don't really have to push for media presence. Of course, there will be releases, brand specific launches, etc., which are like a hygiene activity for any PR department. But I feel strongly that the role of PR is not just to focus on your brand, but also to be the mouth piece of the industry, because if the industry does well, so will you if you're a good enough brand. Going forward, I see the lines blurring between online media and traditional media even more. It's going to be a merged entity, as at the end of the day your mobile phone will be everything for you – your magazine, newspaper, social media, etc., and hence, PR of tomorrow too will be in your hands.