

AUTHORED ARTICLES AND MEDIA INTERACTIONS

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OBSESSION WITH THE CUSTOMER IS THE NEW NORMAL: ATUL RAJA

exchange4media | February 16, 2023

Read Online



Obsession with the customer is the new normal: Atul Raja

At e4m PR & Corp Comm 40 under 40 Summit Atul Raja, Executive Vice President, Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation, delivered a keynote address



At the e4m PR & Corp Comm 40 under 40 Summit, Atul Raja, Executive Vice President, Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation, delivered a keynote address on the 'The Changing Face of Marketing in an Increasingly Digital World', wherein he delved into the ever evolving marketing and communications industries as more interactions, transactions and everything in between move into a digital setting.

"There have been two defining shifts. The first is the strategic shift from brand-centricity to customer centricity, which is almost complete. Given that the pandemic has changed the rest of the world, why won't it change marketing? And point two is the corollary of point one, in that obsession with the customer is the new normal now," he said.

Taking these as the two jumping off points, Raja proceeded to lay down ten points which he said were involved with the transforming nature of marketing thanks to increased digitization during and post the pandemic.

"Firstly, the very economics of marketing has changed. Even smaller players can enter what I call the advertising dogfight," he said adding, "I'm not saying that bigger players with deep pockets don't still have an advantage, but they no longer have a decisive advantage, and it's a more level playing field. So from a marketing perspective, a higher spend may no longer translate into a higher ROI."

Secondly, Raja noted that inbound marketing has taken center stage, and with the media landscape virtually exploding, the number of footfalls coming into all platforms of these organizations is following suit. "These are the footfalls that have done a lot of research and are very pre-purchase savvy. Inherent to this is a tectonic shift from brand push to brand pull. When I started my career, we used to concentrate on pushing what we want to say through ads in different media, but today we have to put out what the consumers want to hear, and so inbound is changing the face of communications."

Thirdly, Raja said that content has taken pre-eminence over creatives. "At the time of my induction into the advertising field, first we used to conceptualize creatives with our ad agencies and the content used to come in as an afterthought and that too has reversed today. Some brands are very content driven, like Zomato, which has a million and a half followers on Twitter and two million on Facebook. You'd think a brand like that would be concentrating on getting footfalls to their app, so how are they getting so much traction on their social media channels? It's because they use so much humour and local cultural cues. I think content plays a big role in Zomato's size."

"Fourthly and critically, Data has come into marketing in a big way, and it is helping marketing in smart decisions, and if you look at scenario based marketing it is helping in measuring the ROI on your marketing in a very scientific manner," said Raja, noting that recently, AB InBev said their sales have gone up by 80% by using the data of their 2.5 billion customers, while Nike is snapping up tech companies, as examples of how brands are harnessing the power of data.

The fifth point, Raja said, was that customers are increasingly promiscuous in their brand relationships. "Be it a manufacturer or a retailer or any other organization, their marketing departments are finding it very hard to find what will ensure consumer stickiness. I think brand and customer loyalty are going to be the bane of marketing in the future and will be very hard to figure out," he said.

Another aspect is ad blindness. "50 per cent of internet users are averse to any kind of pop-ups. When AT&T introduced the very first ad banner back in 1994, the CTR (Click-through Rate) was 44 per cent, while today a CTR of 0.5 is considered very healthy. So marketers are going to have to figure out whether it is still worth spending on pop-ups and what are the alternatives," noted Raja.

Seventh was the very changing nature of consumer engagement, with Raja observing, earlier, the typical marketing funnel had a wide base at the bottom, and that used to be called the considered set. He said, "It was where we attacked consumers first, then went down another level and attacked them again, and then reached the apex of the funnel where there are two three brands left and you would endeavor to be one of them. But now there is no considered set and the consumer starts by having only two or three brands so it becomes a channel to hit them directly and be on their list because there is no second opportunity."

Point number eight was the clutter and how brands could manage to avoid it. "I personally feel that to avoid clutter is to become part of the clutter. High frequency is high engagement. In six months' time, I must have done 600 creatives. There used to be a time when we gave front page solus ad on TOI and a back page premium ad on HT, and we thought we were done for the quarter, but that's no longer the case," said Raja, adding that today you needed a creative factory to leave any kind of impression on a consumer in a crowded market place.

"Then with digital media exploding today, I feel becoming human has become paramount. Today consumers are looking at brand values and that the values are those that they want to associate with. It's no longer just about functional features, and this digital explosion is bringing the human side of the brands to the fore," said Raja.

And finally, "360 degree view of the consumer is paramount today. You have to dissect your consumer and understand them and what they want from every side and angle. It's all about deep consumer intelligence and insights, because if you don't understand your consumer, they will move out of your value chain very soon," concluded Raja.

REWIND 2022: 2022 HAS BEEN A PIVOTAL YEAR FOR INDIA'S PUBLIC RELATIONS- ATUL RAJA

Adgully | December 27, 2022

Read Online 



It's time to review the most significant industry developments as the year 2022 draws to a close. Adgully is reviewing the year 2022 for the M&E, advertising, digital, marketing, PR and communications, along with leading names in the industry as part of our annual **Rewind** series.

Recapping the year Ajul Raja, Executive VP – Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation shares how the year 2022 was a pivotal year for PR Industry, his projections for the trends in 2023 and much more.

2022 has been a pivotal year for India's public relations, marketing and advertising ecosystem, with businesses adapting their strategies to meet the fast-changing customer demands. However, what remains clear is that increased digitalization is transforming customer engagement through valuable and in-depth insights into consumer behaviour patterns. This cuts across the advertising, PR and marketing landscape with 12 defining trends:

1. Customer-centricity with inbound marketing is taking centre stage.
2. Hyper-personalization has enabled a 360-degree view of the consumer.
3. The changed economics of marketing has led to a level-playing field for small businesses.
4. Consumers are becoming increasingly promiscuous in their brand relationships due to a plethora of new media channels.
5. Ad blindness has become rampant, posing a dilemma for online marketers.
6. The traditional marketing and PR funnel no longer captures the shifting nature of consumer engagement.
7. Content is paramount and has surged ahead of creatives.
8. Data-led marketing and PR are the order of the day for informed decision-making.
9. High Frequency is high visibility -- an essential antidote to clutter.
10. Issue Based Marketing and PR have come to the fore.
11. MarTech is now essential to analysing consumers, markets and PR.
12. Campaigns have become reversible, and Moment Marketing is the in-thing.

In 2022, I invested time and efforts in AI-led tools that increased efficiency and productivity and Omnichannel Marketing, which provides a cohesive, seamless experience to the consumer and increases customer retention and ROI. Integrating communication channels like websites, apps, social media, emails and chatbots proved to be a rewarding experience.

THE EMERGING SECTORS FAVORABLE FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA

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Read Online 

The emerging sectors favorable for women entrepreneurs in India

When women start their businesses, they create jobs for other women and help empower them economically.

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EdTech has evolved as one of the fastest-growing sectors and offers many advantages to women entrepreneurs, including a supportive ecosystem, access to capital, and a large talent pool. (Representational image)

By Atul Raja

Lack of proper education, access to finance, and social norms are just a few factors inhibiting women's entrepreneurship in India. However, despite facing various barriers and stumbling blocks, women in India have gone on to create flourishing businesses and jobs.

A study by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor found that the number of women starting businesses in India has increased by 50% since 2014, partly due to the changing conditions for business growth, such as an increasing pool of educated women, more capital-raising avenues, and supportive government policies. Similarly, as per a report by Google and Bain & Company, boosting women's entrepreneurship can create over 30 million women-owned enterprises and generate 150–170 million jobs in India, which is more than 25% of the new jobs required for the entire working-age population, by 2030.

So, which sectors are emerging as the most favorable for women entrepreneurs in India? Here are details of four emerging and high-potential sectors for women entrepreneurs in India.

E-Commerce

The Indian e-commerce sector is poised to grow exponentially. As per GlobalData, it is estimated to reach the INR 7 trillion mark by 2023. Even the smallest of local 'Kirana' stores or homemade food businesses hold the potential to scale up exponentially over the next few years.

Also read| Majority of women job seekers prefer remote working

E-commerce business is amenable to the 'minimum investment, maximum profit' concept and is, therefore, helping women entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses while working from the comfort of their homes or creating their schedules. The relatively lesser investment and low entry barriers, like doing away with large office spaces, encourage enterprising women who grapple with limited mobility and cultural restrictions.

The Green Industry

As per a study by TerraChoice, India has seen a 73% growth in the eco-friendly product market over the last 5-7 years. The green industry is flourishing in India for several reasons. First, the Indian government has been supportive of the growth of this sector. Second, there is a growing awareness among Indian consumers about the importance of environmental sustainability. And third, a large pool of educated women is looking to start their businesses.

From setting up an organic store to investing their time in recycling waste, from making clothes from plastic to establishing brands and factories for eco-friendly toys and handicrafts, all these segments hold huge potential and opportunity for women entrepreneurs in India as it opens up a gender-free level playing field.

However, the twin challenges of lack of mentors and role models in this field will need to be addressed.

HealthTech

HealthTech is one of India's most rapidly growing sectors, with new startups entering the market every day. According to a recent industry report, 'Unleashing the Healthtech Potential' by RBSA Advisors, India's HealthTech ecosystem will be a \$50 billion market by 2033, growing 39% CAGR between 2020 to 2023.

This sector offers several advantages to women entrepreneurs, including a supportive ecosystem, a large talent pool, and a growing customer base. In addition, many HealthTech startups are often founded by women with experience in the healthcare industry. As a result, these startups have a deep understanding of the needs of their customers and can provide innovative solutions that address those needs.

EdTech

EdTech has evolved as one of the fastest-growing sectors and offers many advantages to women entrepreneurs, including a supportive ecosystem, access to capital, and a large talent pool. In addition, ed tech startups often focus on providing innovative solutions to problems in the education system.

The reasons for this sector being high potential for women are not far to seek. Firstly, women have played a pioneering role in the education system for generations, and their involvement as teachers, mentors and school principals has only accelerated with time. Secondly, women's inclination for nurturing the youth, empathy and desire to mentor are well-known. Thirdly, the flexibility that EdTech offers using technology and digital tools has made it even more open to those keen on a work-from-home or flexible role. Lastly, with the new work normal, inclusivity and empathy have come into focus which is given to women.

Female entrepreneurship is not only good for the economy—it's also good for society. When women start their businesses, they create jobs for other women and help empower them economically. In addition, female entrepreneurs are often more likely than their male counterparts to reinvest their profits into their communities. This creates a virtuous cycle of growth and development that can have a transformative effect on entire societies. With more and more sectors now offering an olive branch to women entrepreneurs, there is a big potential to bolster the Indian economy to the next level.

(The author is executive vice-president, global marketing at Wadhvani Foundation. Views expressed are personal.)

HOW INDIA CAN BECOME A HUB FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Deccan Herald | November 20, 2022

Read Online 

How India can become a hub for women entrepreneurs

The high potential of women entrepreneurship in India is corroborated by a recent study by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor



 Atul Raja, NOV 20 2022, 21:45 IST | UPDATED: NOV 21 2022, 07:24 IST



Representative Image. Credit: Getty Images

In recent years, there has been a surge in the number of women entrepreneurs in India. According to a report by NASSCOM, the percentage of women-led startups in India has increased from 8 per cent in 2014 to 13 per cent in 2019. This increase is attributable to several factors, including the rise of digital media and e-commerce, the proliferation of mobile phones and other technology, and the changing social norms.

The high potential of women entrepreneurship in India is corroborated by a recent study by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which shows that Indian women are twice as likely as men to start their businesses and are more likely than men to see entrepreneurship as a good career choice. So why aren't more Indian women becoming entrepreneurs?

The answer may lie in analysing some of the challenges women entrepreneurs face in India. Only 3 per cent of Indian women have access to formal financial institutions, such as banks or microfinance institutions. This lack of access to capital is a significant barrier to entrepreneurship for women in India. Then there are socio-cultural issues that often prove to be stumbling blocks like joint families, running a household and business simultaneously, lack of family support, a patriarchal society and mobility constraints. Also, historically, the lack of successful role models has been a deterrent.

Also Read: [The Pune girl who self-made it to the India rich list](#)

Having said this, a steadily growing tribe of woman entrepreneurs in India provides a great deal of confidence for a positive direction that the entrepreneurial landscape for women is taking, cutting across woman-friendly enterprises like cottage industries to new-age startups. As per recent figures, women comprise 14 per cent of the total entrepreneurs in India, which works out to 8 million. Also, 10 per cent of all formal enterprises are owned by women. Although the figures are small, notably, they represent a steady rise in women entrepreneurs, which is a welcome trend.

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According to a recent survey, the number of women-owned businesses in India has increased by 20 per cent over the past five years. This is a significantly higher rate of growth than that of men-owned businesses, which have only grown by 10 per cent over the same period. The survey also found that women entrepreneurs are more likely to be educated and to have prior work experience than their male counterparts. There are three primary reasons for this steady rise of women entrepreneurship in India that gives us confidence that within the next five years, India will become a hub for women entrepreneurs.

Rise in digital lending

Access to capital has been the biggest bane of women entrepreneurs in India. Traditional lenders are averse to lending to women and demanding collateral as a guarantor along with other conditions. However, the increase in the number of digital lending platforms has made availing business loans much more straightforward for women with a minimum wait time.

Online selling

This is another major trend already on the rise, and the pandemic only served to accelerate it. Now women can sell products right from the comfort of their homes anywhere across the country and globally. All they need to do is to become digital and e-commerce friendly or sign up for online marketplaces.

The annual growth in the number of social media users in India is 4.2 per cent, with more than 19 million new users added in 2021. This provides a massive captive online business audience, especially for women entrepreneurs with mobility issues. Looking back at the evolution of woman entrepreneurship in India over the years and the positive trends, notable opportunities exemplify the vast potential of women entrepreneurship in India. Firstly, we can increasingly see a level-playing field for female entrepreneurs, although there is much more to be done. Secondly, there is lots of scope to inspire and enable the 'latent' but ambitious women solopreneurs and small business owners and expand the funnel. Thirdly, there is a strong domain-specific platform to build, strengthen and scale productive rural agripreneurs.

What is needed today is a coordinated effort across stakeholder groups that will provide an enabling and comprehensive policy framework, equal access to finance, expansion of mentorship and networking channels, tailored knowledge and capability building, and cultural openness. The good news is that there are several initiatives to help female entrepreneurs in India, and Niti Aayog has taken the lead with initiatives like the Women's Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), a unified portal and a one-stop shop for all things related to women's entrepreneurship in India. The next phase of WEP was launched in 2021 in partnership with Cisco and Flipkart to enhance the community experience. Hopefully, in the coming years, India will see a major shift towards women dominating its entrepreneurial horizon.

(The author is the executive vice president of global marketing at Wadhvani Foundation)

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND HOW THEY CAN SEEK GUIDANCE

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Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and how they can seek guidance

By Atul Raja, ET CONTRIBUTORS • Last Updated: Nov 18, 2022, 07:15 PM IST

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Synopsis

Apart from boosting the economy by generating jobs, it also leads to transformational social and personal outcomes for women. In the last decade, the number of women-owned enterprises went up from 14 per cent to 20 per cent, as per government sources. However, India still lags behind when compared with other emerging economies.



The number one hurdle that female entrepreneurs in India face is the lack of monetary support.

India's growth story is an incredible one, but the unfortunate truth is that it has left behind a key demographic component: women. Despite the various advances in social indicators, India's progress has been slow towards economic inclusion and the development of women.

Fostering women's entrepreneurship in

India is a critical part of the overall solution. Apart from boosting the economy by generating jobs, it also leads to transformational social and personal outcomes for women. In the last decade, the number of women-owned enterprises went up from 14 per cent to 20 per cent, as per government sources. However, India still lags behind when compared with other emerging economies.

Which begs the question, what is holding back Indian women entrepreneurs? And what can they do to seek the right kind of aid in order to succeed?

The number one hurdle that female entrepreneurs in India face is the lack of monetary support. They lack adequate access to finances and credit-lending facilities. There is a widespread but hugely erroneous belief that a woman's right to ancestral property and wealth is limited to her dowry. However, this limits women from staking their rightful claim to generational wealth and acts as a barrier for women, especially in semi-urban and rural areas. Women entrepreneurs have time and again spoken out against limited access to formal credit-lending platforms as well. And when they do gain access, the trend shows that their applications are less likely to be considered favorably as compared to men.

Secondly, societal beliefs and cultural norms are major stumbling blocks for women. The assumed role of women is that of primary caregivers. Professional work, especially outside the confines of home, then becomes secondary. It's far from easy to juggle running a household and a business at the same time, even if domestic workers are brought into the picture. Moreover, social permission to work is often tough to obtain due to cultural practices and safety considerations. Together, this leads to reduced mobility, and in turn, reduced likelihood of becoming successful startup founders.

Finally, budding women entrepreneurs have traditionally lacked inspirational role models in terms of successful women-led businesses making it difficult for them to visualize how success will look like. Although the winds of change are blowing today with women-led unicorns like BabyChakra, MyGlamm, Nykaa etc., there is still a long way to go. As per a 2021 IWAGE report, in the organized/ formal jobs sector, only seven out of every 100 entrepreneurs in India are women.

With India ranking 70th among 77 countries covered in the Female Entrepreneurship Index, a lot needs to be done at a policy and corporate level to encourage women's entrepreneurship. At the same time, women must also meet challenges head-on and persevere in the face of adversity.

A critical thing women entrepreneurs can do to further their entrepreneurial ambitions is to tap into established platforms. In semi-urban and rural areas, where resources are limited, it becomes all the more vital to seek assistance from community networks. Such platforms can provide business guidance and support to women, right from market reach to financial aid. Women must not shy away from actively reaching out for help and seeking solutions.

Women should also keep an eye out for opportunities that will advance their businesses. For instance, they can sign up for special training or peer-based learning in developing and growing their business by participating in the widely available incubator and accelerator programs that provide crucial business inputs on concepts, frameworks, tools, and networks. Increased digitization is now a major facilitating factor in addressing the erstwhile accessibility and mobility constraints.

Women entrepreneurs should also aggressively seek out and engage with business mentors who act as sounding boards and advisors giving objective yet personalized suggestions. There are mentors who are experts in specific business domains, and there are others who simply focus on strengthening the business fundamentals and aiding in taking the right business decisions. In many cases, mentoring has proved to be the secret sauce to achieving entrepreneurial success. As India's entrepreneurial ecosystem matures, many mentors now have vast experience in understanding the trials and tribulations of starting a business and the market forces that come into play while scaling up.

As India works towards its ambitious growth plans, we must put every effort into increasing the share of women in the entrepreneurial landscape of India as this will not only lead to their financial empowerment and independence, but it also has the potential to foster tremendous social change. A World Bank report of 2022 says India can grow in double digits if more women participate in the product line of the economy. Ecosystem stakeholders must come together with a sense of urgency and coordinate interventions and efforts to enable women entrepreneurs to create jobs and million-dollar businesses.

(The writer is Executive Vice President – Global Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation)

(Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this column are that of the writer. The facts and opinions expressed here do not reflect the views of www.economicstimes.com.)

WHAT IS METAVERSE MARKETING? WHY IT IS IMPORTANT?

Policy Circle | November 15, 2022

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What is metaverse marketing? Why it is important?

Atul Raja — November 15, 2022 



The metaverse marketing opportunity is expected to grow at a CAGR of 37.1% to \$758.6 Billion in 2026. It offers a huge opportunity to India, a reservoir of creative and IT talent.

If you haven't heard of metaverse marketing, you're not alone. But don't let that mislead you; metaverse marketing is touted as nothing less than the future of marketing. Although still in its infancy, a number of companies have started using it to great effect. Ikea, for example, has created a virtual showroom where customers can browse furniture and see how it would look in their homes before they buy it. BMW has also created a virtual test drive experience so that potential customers can experience what it's like to drive one of their cars without having to leave their living rooms.

So, what is [metaverse marketing](#)? It is a heady cocktail of 3D, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and blockchain. In other words, it's a new, immersive, interactive way to reach your target audience. A recent survey of marketing professionals found that nearly half the respondents believe that metaverse marketing will be "very important" to their business in the next five years.

READ | [India's economy from Nehru to Modi – a conversation with Pulapre Balakrishnan](#)

Metaverse marketing offers a number of advantages over traditional marketing techniques. First, it allows businesses to create realistic simulations of their products or services. This means that customers can try before they buy, which reduces the risk of buyer's remorse. Second, Metaverse Marketing is highly personalized. Customers can choose their avatars and interact with brands in a way that feels natural to them. Third, Metaverse Marketing is interactive and engaging. Customers are more likely to remember an experience they had fun with than one that was routine or tedious.

In PR and external relations, we usually use the term Confidence Building Measures (CBMs); here are a few CBMs strongly indicating that Metaverse is here to stay.

CBM 1: Trends and data on metaverse marketing

- Internet searches for the term "metaverse" rose 7,200% in 2021.
- The keyword "metaverse" generated 240 million results on Google this year, up from 164 million last year.
- Metaverse was tweeted over 1,800 times per hour on Twitter in 2021, and #Metaverse resulted in more than 1.1 million posts on Instagram.
- In 2021, metaverse-related companies reportedly raised upward of \$10 billion, more than twice as much as they did in the previous year.

A report by Gartner has predicted that by 2026:

- 25% of people will spend at least one hour a day in the Metaverse to work, shop, attend school, socialize, or consume entertainment.
- At least 30% of the organizations in the world will have products and services ready for Metaverse.
- The global market for Metaverse is projected to reach a size of US\$758.6 Billion, growing at a CAGR of 37.1%.

CBM 2: Web 3.0

Metaverse, in effect, will replace many of the things done on websites today. Web 3.0—the backbone of the Metaverse—offers a new channel to play with, not controlled by a few tech companies but relies on blockchain technology, machine learning and artificial intelligence. Therefore, increasingly high levels of consumer adoption will propel fundamental change.

CBM 3: Rise of creator economy

The Metaverse needs content creators, i.e., an army of talent, to fill its virtual space with interactive and immersive content, thanks mainly to advances in VR and AR. In contrast, creators need a space to grow their full potential. Therefore, Metaverse could be the future of the creator economy. The relationship between Metaverse and the Creator Economy looks like a pre-arranged marriage. Both cannot survive without the other.

CBM 4: Wider set of use cases

Gaming in the Metaverse already has mainstream traction. Consumer use cases are now expanding into new immersive retail, entertainment, sports, and educational experiences. Also, there are Metaverse's sizable but less talked about enterprise applications and opportunities, including virtual employee training and team collaboration with avatars, virtual prototyping in manufacturing and construction, and virtual-showroom displays for products such as cars.

CBM 5: The 'avatar' pull factor

One of the most important elements in the Metaverse is one's own Avatar. It has been widely reported that people are willing to spend dollars to buy virtual products and dress up their avatars to depict their vision of themselves in a virtual world.

CBM 6: Rise of interest-based communities

Interest-based community marketing could potentially take centre stage in this new virtual realm of opportunities, bringing together a significant number of communities centred around specific interests and enabling marketers to create specific and targeted campaigns.

CBM 7: Continuous technological advances

Cloud and edge computing with intensive large-data processes, such as graphics rendering, are seeing improvements. At the same time, the upcoming 5G will enable mobile devices to access these large worlds more easily. Also, the cost of production for augmented and virtual reality hardware is declining.

CBM 8: Demographic tailwinds

The oldest Gen Z consumers are in their mid-20s now. Increasingly, they are an income-earning force to be reckoned with. These consumers are more familiar with virtual worlds, transactions, and goods than previous generations are.

The Metaverse could be the next frontier of the internet, taking virtual experiences to the next level and giving organizations opportunities to reach consumers in new and innovative ways. It has the potential to change many technologies, standards, conventions, and monetization models and will have a profound generational change. Most importantly, it will reach many new categories marketers have long hoped for.

The metaverse is becoming popular by the day. In China, there are already metaverse platforms with millions of users. And in India, a few metaverse platforms are starting to gain traction for businesses, creating avatars to represent their brand and interact with potential customers. Also, we will see many more virtual stores where people can browse and purchase products. The possibilities are endless. And with the number of internet users in India set to double in the next five years, now is the time to start exploring the metaverse marketing opportunity.

(Atul Raja is Executive Vice President, Global Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation.)

IT RULES AMENDMENT: GOVT INTERVENTION OR SELF-REGULATION, SOME GREY AREAS REMAIN

Adgully | October 31, 2022

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IT Rules amendment: Govt intervention or self-regulation, some grey areas remain



The Laws and Rules in the tech space have evolved rapidly in the last two years with the increase in social media and digital usage by the consumers. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) noted that there is a need to amend the IT Rules to keep up with the challenges and gaps emerging in an expanding digital ecosystem.

The IT Act 2000 was brought into action and the focus of IT Rules 2000 was to provide "electronic commerce", or transactions made via electronic data exchange and other forms of electronic communication, a legal status. However, issues like Cybercrime and Cyberbully were not mentioned in the act.

Hence, The Information Technology Amendment Act, 2008, a significant revision to the IT Act, 2000, was adopted in 2008 to address some of the primary problems. The insertion of the Section 66A, which punished transmitting 'offensive texts', was one of the changes highlighted. Additionally, it created Section 69, which granted authorities the power to 'intercept, monitor, or decode any information through any computer resource'. It also included laws addressing voyeurism, child porn, cyberterrorism, and pornography.

Although the amendments and the numerous rules outlined aimed to address a number of issues, experts believe the issues like transparency, cyber security, spamming, phishing, data protection in online banking, privacy protection, identity theft, cyber war, cyber stalking, cyber fraud, chat room abuse, theft of internet hours, copyright and trademark violations, gaming, cryptocurrency, social media, and many others still need to be addressed.

Major pieces of secondary and subordinate legislation like the Information Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines) Rules, 2011, the Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018 and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, have been notified to make basically social media intermediaries accountable. These Rules have been framed to curb users from engaging in online material which is paedophilic, pornographic, hateful, racially and ethnically objectionable, invasive of privacy, etc., and to prevent mob lynchings spurred by fake news and rumours and messages circulated on social media platforms.

The Information Technology Act of 2000 and its following amendments/ rules were insufficient, and the Government of India intends to draft the Digital India Act (DIA) in the coming months to solve these issues. This has been stated by the Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology, Rajeev Chandrashekar. According to him, India will replace the IT Act of 2000 with a new law called the Digital India Act that will include a new set of laws and regulations that will 'act as accelerators for innovation and defending citizens' rights'. To help India flourish in the 'techade', the new legal system will be adjusted to the realities of the 21st Century.

Now, the government declared on Saturday, October 29, 2022, that platforms operating in India will have to abide by local laws and the Constitutional rights of Indian users. As a result of the new IT Rules, social media companies are legally required to use all reasonable means to prevent the dissemination of illegal content and false information. The guidelines have been created in response to complaints regarding intermediaries' responses to user complaints about unacceptable content, including measures such as suspending accounts or inaction.

Also Read: IT Rules amended; new Grievance Appellate Committee for social media complaints

Posting this on his Twitter handle, **Rajeev Chandrashekar, Union Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology, and Union Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship**, said, "Digital Nagriks/ citizens' grievances will now never go unaddressed under amended #ITRules - a Grievance Appellate committee formed."

He further posted, "Amended #ITRules makes intermediaries responsible for enforcing their own content guidelines AND also ensure NO content on platform of 9 types from Porn to someone else's content to online gambling to misinformation, etc."

Chandrashekar further tweeted, "New amended IT Rules are the next step to realising our government's duty to Digital Nagriks of Open, Safe & Trusted, Accountable Internet. It also marks a new partnership between Govt and Intermediaries in making and keeping our Internet safe & trusted for all Indians."

He also stated that the new changes to the information Technology (IT) rules ensure that these platforms cannot suspend citizens' accounts without following a deliberate procedure.

Adgully reached out to a cross-section of experts from the digital space to know about their views and opinions on the new amendment to the IT Rules and how it will impact the social media ecosystem.



Ashok Lalla, a Digital Business Advisor, noted, "The changes have been made with the idea to increase the accountability of the intermediaries and social media platforms to its users and to ensure compliance to the Constitution of India. This is always a positive thing. While accountability was expected earlier too, the onus on the platforms has been more strongly emphasized now. The strengthening of the redressal mechanism by replacing the Grievance Redressal Officer with a Redressal Committee is another aspect of the new rules. However, the compliance to the rules by the platforms and how easily an ordinary citizen receives relief via the Grievance Redressal committee when they are aggrieved is to be seen and will demonstrate the true effectiveness of the revised rules."



On the other hand, **Ashish Bhasin, Co-Founder and Chairman, RD&X Network** was of the opinion that the regulation should be

self regulatory rather than Government imposed. He added, "There is definitely some need to regulate social media and even some part of the OTT channels. The reason for that is the polarisation that can happen through fake news is very strong. The committee is going to be constituted within three months, which will be an appellate-like committee for looking at the content, whether it's appropriate or not. I feel that the intent is right, but I'm always a little worried about the Government getting into censorship. Things can go the other way in that sense."

According to Bhasin, the better solution is that there should be some sort of restraint and regulation, particularly where there is false information being spread or any harmful or mischievous activity done. But the solution, he felt, was self regulation by the industry itself. "The tech players are large enough and have enough technology and resources. A body like ASCI, which is an industry-led body, gets self regulation, it involves intellectuals from the public space, it involves people from the industry, it also involves experts and knowledge holders in the field. That to me would make it more palatable than a Government appointed committee looking into it. I fear that it should not get misused," he opined.



Atul Raja, Executive Vice President - Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation said,

"The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2022 should prove to be effective in removing some of the ambiguity of the IT Rules 2021 and the biggest change is that social media platforms are now subject to the sovereign law of India as they need to comply by the provisions of the Constitution of India. The new rules are designed to bring transparency, safety and accountability through a digital media ethics code, which will regulate the use of social media, online news platforms and other digital channels and assumes significance in the light of the high degree of proliferation that we are seeing in fake news, misinformation, objectionable and defamatory content. Significantly, the Social Media Intermediaries will now be required to have a Compliance or Grievance Officer, who will come under the purview of the Grievance Appellate Committee, which has the power to override the decision of the Compliance or Grievance Officer. This is significant as it provides a redressal and governance forum for the first time besides judicial

recourse. It is likely to significantly impact how information is shared in India and create a more responsible and responsive online environment."

He further added, "Although the amendment is aimed at taking down defamatory, inflammatory or offensive content through stricter Intermediary Guidelines and protecting users from arbitrary 'deplatformation', there are still some grey areas to be addressed before we can have a final say in this matter like:

- (1) Expedient redressal of complaints is outlined as within 72 hours of reporting. In today's 'redefined' social media age, this is too long a period.
- (2) The amendment applies to Significant Social Media Intermediaries (SSMIs), defined as platforms with over 5 million subscribers. This leaves a huge number of small and medium digital platforms outside the purview of the amendment.
- (3) The structure, scope, powers, composition and terms of reference of the Grievance Appellate Committee are yet to be formalised and much will depend on how the right balance is struck on these parameters so that free speech and public discourse are protected."

RELENTLESSLY RELEVANT BRANDS ARE CENTERED AROUND A STRATEGIC PURPOSE

Social Samosa | May 10, 2022

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Opinion: Relentlessly Relevant Brands are centered around a strategic purpose

Guest Post | May 10, 2022



Atul Raja of Wadhvani Foundation talks about the strategic purpose of increasing brand relevance and sheds light on how it reduces tactical marketing costs, over time.

A plethora of brand launches happen every year. Brands come and go. However, only a select group stands the test of time and reaps the benefits of enduring customer preference. So, what makes these brands relevant with a strong customer connect? What makes them special and aspirational? Though there is no 'one size fits all' formula; still the reasons are not far to seek.

Next-level Strategies for Next-level Brand Relevance

Next-level Customer Centricity: It's all about working tirelessly to entrench the brand in consumer lifestyles. If the customer reaction is generally, "I can't imagine another brand", "Caters to my needs", "Makes me happy", and "Connects with me emotionally", then the brand is in great space. Brussels Airlines is a great example of endearing the brand to the hearts of its customers. There are few commercial sequels that touch us the same way as their original (Mr. Smith, it's a Boy), and Brussels Airlines did this in an iconic way fifteen years later with the same actors (Mr. Smith Jr, Happy Birthday!)

Next-level Customer Reach: It's all about doing whatever it takes to be there for the customers. If the customer reaction is generally, "Is available everywhere", "Makes my life convenient", "Delivers a standard experience", and "It is dependable", then the brand is in assured space. Project Shakti, with 1.4 lakh women micro-entrepreneurs (Shakti ammas) across 18 states, covers half the villages in rural India and is a great example of penetrating deep into far-flung markets and creating livelihoods at the same time.

Next-level innovation: It's all about constantly shape-shifting to stay ahead of technological changes and consumer trends. If the customer reaction is generally, "Pushes the status quo", "Engages with me in new and creative ways", and "Has better products, services, and experiences than competitors", then the brand has created a strong foundation. Hilton unveiled the ability to unlock hotel rooms via smart-phone and created the 'Connected Room', which remembers a guest's preferences like favourite TV channels, room temperature and light settings and makes automatic adjustments each time they check in.

Next-level Inspiration: It's all about a talismanic, aspirational quality that dovetails with consumers' dreams. If the customer reaction is generally, "Makes me feel inspired", "Has a purpose I believe in", "I trust", and "Is modern and in-touch", then the brand has created top-notch equity. Co-Create IKEA is a digital platform encouraging customers and fans to develop new products. If a suggestion for furniture or product design is successful, IKEA may license the technology or agree to invest in future products.

Next-level Partnerships: It's all about leveraging the partner's reach and customer base, boosting visibility amongst new target audiences. If the customer reaction is generally, "Oh, I never knew this brand has so many features", "Never came across this brand - looks interesting", and "Worth a try", then the brand has created new customers and new markets.

When Ola partnered with OnePlus, it made complete sense because both brands target the upwardly mobile consumer in urban India. Ola Customers were exposed to OnePlus' latest smartphone, OnePlus X, on-demand through the Ola app. Twenty two thousand people interacted with OnePlus, and around a thousand phones were sold as a result of this partnership.

Next-level Bonding: It's all about listening and understanding what matters to customers. It's not just about how they think; it's also about how they feel. If the customer reaction is generally, "I feel important", "I enjoy the personalized touch", and "The experience is wonderful", then the brand is creating memorable experiences through hyper-personalization.

Netflix is a great example of creating and distributing content that speaks to customers at every touchpoint in the brand journey and continually tracks data with a strong recommendation engine to customize the customer experience.

WHY SHOULD STARTUPS INVEST EARLY IN BRAND BUILDING?

Adgully | March 03, 2022

Read Online 



In 2018, a credit card payment platform to reward every transaction was silently launched. Initially, this startup's marketing and communication were focused on blogs and youtube videos related to financial topics. Effectively the effort was to build a thought leader brand that serves customers with the most useful content to make them financially literate and their credit card usage trustworthy. After building a 'connected' brand and securing funding, the startup took its branding and marketing to the next level through IPL sponsorship and iconic ads like "Indranagar ka Gunda". And we all came to know about this 'unmissable' startup as 'Cred'.

Similarly, in 2015 the health tech startup, PharmEasy was launched. This B-school project at IIM-Ahmedabad is today the biggest pharmacy aggregator in India, catering to 25 lakh families annually and the first ePharmacy unicorn in India. But till 2018, PharmEasy did not spend a single money on expensive mass media advertising. Instead, it successfully relied

on word of mouth and performance marketing through social and other online media. Post-2018, the startup built upon the goodwill and credibility by going big on TV advertising, enabling its advertising message to reach millions of homes through the hit number: "Urvasi Urvasi", supplemented by the catchy tagline -- "Take it easy, PharmEasy".

So what are the EARLY BRANDING lessons we can take from these two unicorns that went through the grind but were able to initiate a strong brand journey without spending big advertising dollars.

Treat your startup as a brand from day one

Brand building is a step-by-step process and a long haul. Therefore, the earlier the process of brand development begins, the better the chances of creating a strong platform for higher brand equity and reach in due course.

The notion that brand building is necessarily expensive and is the prerogative of big organizations with deep pockets needs to be thrown out of the window. Innovation is key in this time of new-age media. The approach should be to create cost-effective awareness and messaging by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different media vehicles.

A key branding objective should be to develop 'Brand Trust'

An Edelman global survey reveals that 81% of consumers trust the brand as an important determinant for purchase. However, despite a reliable product/service, building brand trust doesn't happen overnight – it requires consistent and transparent communication, which stands the test of time.

Brand Trust essentially reflects the credibility of advertising claims as seen by the customers on a sustained, long-term basis and is instrumental in creating loyalty, engagement, and advocacy.

Focus on 'Consumer Connect'

The startup, Cred, targeted colleagues of its existing users in an innovative way. Visualise a boring shift job, and suddenly out of nowhere, you receive a cake as a reward for paying bills. Yes, deep customer engagement can result from simple actions like sending a cake! Providing customers with a "wow" factor can be as simple as sending a handwritten thank-you note.

Never lose sight of the USP

Your 'Unique Selling Proposition' has to be the fulcrum of your branding and communication efforts. What differentiates your products/services from the competition is an important selling hook that needs to become the hook of your branding efforts as well.

While the USP can range across price, quality, service, speed, convenience and originality, the branding and communication should crystallize this unique strength by finding answers to questions like, What problem does the product/service solve? How is the offering different from that of the competition? How long will the USP remain unique? The right answers to these questions can form the basis of a compelling brand journey!

Brand Development execution is all about the right timing

The sense of timing for brand promotions, ground events, and other ATL (Above the Line) and BTL (Below the Line) activities is critical in creating brand equity and marketing traction. This can manifest in various ways. The offers and discounts by FMCG and consumer durable brands during the festival season is an example. Another example is the 'Cred' ad featuring Olympic Gold Medalist Neeraj Chopra.

Content and Social Media Marketing is unavoidable

In an increasingly digital world, brand building cannot ignore online marketing. The use of digital and social channels has exploded in recent times, and they are a powerful medium of reaching out to customers at large transcending geographical boundaries.

Also, online marketing efforts are measurable, allow storytelling, and offer the flexibility of pausing campaigns, taking corrective measures, and moving forward. Driving engagement to create brand loyalty is a great benefit of online media.

Look at branding beyond the obvious (like logo or website creation)

In this age of digitization and changing consumer habits towards media consumption, startups should leverage a plethora of cost-effective or open-source technologies available that enable laser-sharp targeting of potential customers.

To sum up, a strong brand is built on equally strong ideation and provides great value to the business. Brand building is not just for large or legacy corporations - think of 'Paytm Karo', the catchy slogan that has become synonymous with barcode-based mobile-led payment. Your brand is the gateway to your business, and if your branding efforts are genuine, remarkable and experiential, then you may well have the recipe for success!

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS MAKING DEEP INROADS IN MARKETING

Agency Reporter | February 14, 2022

Read Online 



Actionable consumer insights are creating 'never before' experiences, smart engagements, and increased conversions. The results of two recent surveys caught my attention but certainly did not catch me by surprise.

Deloitte's 2020 global survey of early AI adopters showed that amongst the top five AI objectives, three were marketing-led, i.e., enhancing existing products and services, creating new products and services, and enhancing relationships with customers.

Also, as per Salesforce's sixth State of Marketing report (2020), a significant 84% of marketers reported using AI for marketing. This is up from 29% in 2018!

As a career marketer, I feel AI is like a humanities discipline that enables understanding and decoding human intelligence and cognition. There is unanimity in the industry that AI is no longer the 'future'. It has arrived, and it's very much here to stay. I have never seen or tracked such a fast-moving technology, and this just seems to be the start!

So, how are the AI-based advanced machine learning algorithms building solutions that will continue to streamline the rigors of crunching huge amounts of data analytics and time-consuming tasks that marketers struggle to deal with on a day-to-day basis? While the AI horizon is extensive, let us examine some of the current and significant AI-led developments in the world of Marketing.

P-E-M: Pre-emptive Marketing

AI is being leveraged to achieve a high level of data analytics that map customer personas based on virtual and on-site interactions, predict purchase patterns and consumer behavior, identify referral sources and create effective customer segmentation.

Once these patterns are identified, marketers can preemptively promote solutions, products, or programs to their respective audience segments.

An excellent example of pre-emptive marketing is Netflix and its 'you may also like' prompt. Netflix's hugely appreciated recommendation engine amalgamates viewing data and runs it through their AI programs to pinpoint similar shows or movies for a viewer to enjoy.

Hyper-Personalization

A marketer's dream is to reach out to individual customers or a specific group with customized communication. AI is fast realizing this dream. The hallmark of hyper-personalization is that it takes consumer experience to the next level with the help of predictive analytics, UX, and content applications. The result is the creation of an empathetic brand that delivers results.

Currently, hyper-personalized marketing predominantly sees its applications fructify in the retail and e-commerce segments. Thanks to its enormous inventory and subscription options, Amazon engages with its customers on a 360-degree basis right from the home page. Not many know that Amazon also delivers a customized homepage for every customer based on their previous purchasing behavior, preferences, browsing history, and entries to the cart.

Starbucks has shown that the more customer data you capture, the more laser-sharp your marketing can get. The company successfully integrates the data from its gamified mobile app and loyalty/rewards program with information such as purchase history and location to provide personalized communication and offers to individual customers.

Optimizing Marketing Spends

AI can throw up data to target advertising to higher-intent audiences and maximize retargeting efforts, thereby reducing the wastage factor, and stretching the value of the advertising dollar; combining AI with tools like campaign budget optimization, dynamic bidding, and dynamic creatives can power marketing budgets towards higher ROI.

AI's inherent advanced data processing capabilities are being leveraged to identify the proper channels to market, the right target audience, the right markets, the right influencers capped with predictive analytics for smart cost calculation that can save millions of dollars from advertising budgets.

Conversion Management

Trends clearly show that hyper-personalization can turbocharge a brand's ROI by delivering smarter and more targeted campaigns.

SEE ALSO

[Guest Article](#)
Why do brands need to have a personal touch and feel for more consumer engagement?

Lead Management is defined through 'Growth Marketing' and 'Performance Marketing', two of the fastest developing areas in the marketing domain. While sales teams are looking at Marketing to get the so-called 'hot leads', Marketing teams have traditionally struggled to find the right TG or customers in the 'considered set' for better outcomes and optimal cost/lead.

Let's take an example of how AI can help marketers reach the right customers at the right place. The AI engines can connect to CRM systems and optimize the ads for multiple platforms. They can also shut down non-performing ads. Simultaneously, marketing campaigns are directed to customers who are liable to be in the 'interested category'. This level of automation across platforms, customers, and markets has the potential to be a game-changer for both inbound and outbound lead generation and conversion efforts.

Content Efficiency

AI technology can help content marketers appeal to their target audiences more efficiently and easily. Human creativity will remain at the core of the content, but AI tools can help achieve more humanity. Today, a significant portion of sports and finance-related articles are written by machines as both these sectors are traditionally number-heavy, making it easy for AI programs to understand the data and translate it into human-readable articles.

However, as marketing becomes increasingly more focused, the content will begin to be written (or at least outlined) by automated programs for other sectors.

It is estimated that the current AI-led global spending on artificial intelligence hardware, software, and services is more than \$340 billion, and this will rise exponentially in the next few years as AI will have many more smart applications than I could list in this article spanning from maintaining trust and transparency through authentic communication (avoiding the menace of Fake News), Virtual and Augmented Reality, efficient response in times of crisis, understanding risks related to corporate reputation and bridging communities and disciplines.

THE ALL-PERVASIVE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN NEW-AGE MARKETING

INDIANtelevision | February 05, 2022

Read Online 

GUEST COLUMN: The all-pervasive role of technology in new-age marketing

Understanding the top 5 technologies that will reshape the marketing industry in the times to come

05 Feb, 2022 - 02:16 PM IST | By Atul Raja



Mumbai: It was October 2020 when a Cadbury campaign featuring the Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) caught my attention. Christened as a 'Not.Just.A.CadburyAd', the campaign blended SRK's image and voice using AI to create customised ads for local shops by directly naming them.

This idea to promote local businesses when they had taken a big hit during the pandemic was widely appreciated. Also, from a creative angle, the campaign went viral. This level of hyper-personalisation could only be possible with the use of AI-led innovation and technology. This reflects two defining developments:

1. How new-age marketing is developing a deep understanding of the latest technology tools now playing a key role in developing meaningful customer relationships, and delivering friction-free, cross-channel experiences for consumers.

2. 'Unified Analytics' will replace 'analytics by channel' and customer groups will see an elevated level of strategic measurements and a much more holistic view of the customer.

The chances are that while browsing through any marketing guide today, you will find it peppered with tech jargon. That's how ubiquitous technology has become to the very essence and practice of marketing. As a result, brand campaigns have become more personalised and immersive than ever.

While technology has exploded and there are hundreds of versions vying for space in the market, here are the 'Top five most transformative technologies' that will reshape marketing in times to come:

1. Increasing use of Chatbots

This AI-led software can simulate meaningful conversations with internet users in a natural language through a combination of text and voice messages. Its popularity is increasing by the day due to its 24x7 role in solving customer queries. Bluebot, the chatbot of KLM Royal Dutch Airline, reported in excess of 1.7 million messages from 500,000 passengers.

According to Salesforce, 69 per cent of the US consumers prefer using chatbots when engaging with brands since it often leads to a prompt response. As per estimates, ~40 per cent of big organisations are already using chatbots, and in the next few years, ~80 per cent of communication between the customers and organisations will be done through chatbots.

2. The rise of Voice Assistants

Voice assistants like Amazon's Alexa and Apple's Siri have greatly altered the way users search for information on the web, fast gaining popularity in the voice search feature of search engines due to two important factors;

-Average typing speed of 41.4 words per minute is far less productive than the speed at which we speak, i.e. 160 words per minute

-The Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology has gotten very advanced, making it easier for voice assistants to pick up and dissect queries accurately.

Recent statistics reveal that one-third of 3.5 million searches on Google are voice searches. Therefore, from a marketer's point of view, the voice search SEO strategy becomes important by updating content and becoming mindful of keyword research tools to come up with more voice search questions.

3. Fast growth of Virtual Reality

The rise of Virtual Reality (VR) is mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, the hardware is relatively inexpensive. A Google Cardboard VR headset and a smartphone are enough for you to immerse yourself in another world. Also, many VR applications available on smartphones are completely free to play.

Secondly, the unique user experience is visceral, the controls are far more intuitive, and the characters more relatable. That's why it has been dubbed as the 'ultimate empathy machine.'

Taking a few examples from the retail sector, Tanishq partnered with Milestone Brandcom to install augmented reality (AR) kiosks (termed as 'MirrAR') for elevating the jewellery shopping experience. On the other hand, Lenskart offers 3D face modelling by measuring and mapping the user's face from multiple angles, thereby providing a 360-degree view of the glasses. Similarly, Sephora's AR beauty app lets users try makeup by superimposing certain lipstick shades and eyeliner looks using users' selfie poses.

4. The imminent rise of Web 3.0

Web 3.0, which is being built on blockchain technology [underlying bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies], aims to eliminate all-controlling intermediaries and provide the key benefit of a single login across social media accounts for seamless browsing, networking, engagement, and data security.

This blockchain-led tech has the potential to re-invent the digital marketing industry. With users having direct control over their data and privacy, companies will have the opportunity to become highly user-centric and transparent by :

- Analysing customer buying habits across platforms
- Gathering previously unobtainable data on how consumers interact with devices and products
- Gaining deeper insights on where a customer is in the buying journey.

International luxury brands such as Balenciaga and Adidas are ahead of the curve and have started experimenting with Web 3.0, but time will tell how such virtual interactions can become stickier, and translate to potential sales. Even everyday brands like Taco Bell, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Gucci, and Warner Music are using non-fungible tokens (NFTs), thus introducing more and more audiences to the process of buying, owning, and selling digital collectibles. A great way for marketers to leverage NFTs is to use the technology for tickets and souvenirs.

5. AI-led Hyper-Personalisation

The concept of a hyper-personalised experience is based on the use of AI in understanding and learning from human responses to communication by using data, such as recent purchases etc. This hyper-accurate segmentation of AI engines is a marketer's delight in providing improved customer experience beyond assumptions and practices by using Customer Data Platforms (CDPs) as solutions for data architecture, integration, and reliability problems.

Starbucks is an excellent example of hyper-personalisation. It took its already personalised menu to the next level by adopting a real-time personalization engine [primarily pulling data from their loyalty app] that produces individualized offers for their customers based on their previous behaviour and preferences.

Most organisations utilise only ~15 per cent of the technologies and capabilities they are already paying for. Therefore, the number of technologies adopted is not as important as 'applying' them to solve business needs. Today, marketers are at the critical junction of integrating human experience and technology. They have forever been trying to demystify the customer's mind. Thanks to technology, now we have endless ways of knowing!

(The author is executive vice president - global marketing at Wadhvani Foundation. The views expressed in this column are personal and Indiantelevision.com may not subscribe to them.)

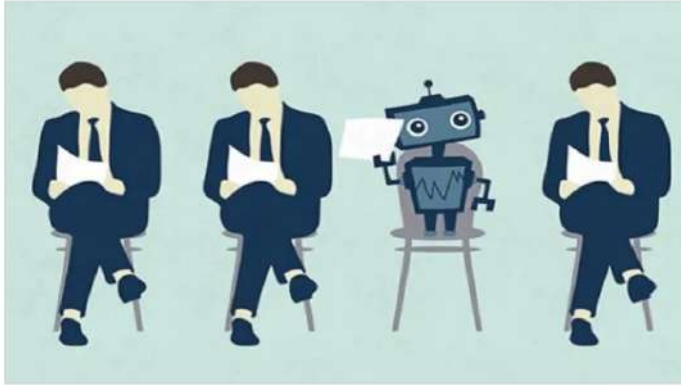
RIDING THE RESKILLING AND UPSKILLING TSUNAMI: TACKLING JOB AUTOMATION-LED DISPLACEMENT

Business Today | December 26, 2021

Read Online 

Riding the reskilling and upskilling tsunami: Tackling job automation-led displacement

The content created for future learners must use a "learn to learn" philosophy that encourages and enables students to continuously reskill and improve their value in job markets.



As technology reshapes job markets, there will be an urgent need to reskill existing workforces.



Atul Raja
Dec 17, 2021, Updated Dec 22, 2021, 8:49 AM IST

The World Economic Forum has good news for those worried about technology and automation taking away jobs. Its report, *Future of Jobs*, which makes a forecast for the period ending 2022, says 75 million current job roles may be displaced by the shift in the division of labour between humans, machines and algorithms, while 133 million new job roles may emerge simultaneously.

As technology reshapes job markets, there will be an urgent need to reskill existing workforces. Without reskilling or upskilling, the new job roles will not be filled.

Worse, millions will find that their skills don't match market needs. They will be rendered jobless, which is why employers and governments need to increase the momentum around their reskilling and upskilling programmes.

Also Read: [IT cos to slash 3 million jobs; 30% of low-skill force by 2022: BoA](#)

Naturally, technical skills will be most in demand. These will center on data management, analytics, machine learning, AI, blockchain, cloud, augmented reality, etc.

But the march of automation will continue across industries and jobs. From accountants to factory workers, from agriculturists to retail executives and healthcare workers to customer service agents, everyone will find the technology component in their roles increase. The change is forecasted to be sharp.

WEF estimates suggest that division of labour measured in hours spent by humans will keep falling steadily: It was 71% in 2018, it will be 58% in 2022 and 48% by 2025; machines and algorithms did 29% of the work in 2018, will do 42% in 2022 and will account for 52% by 2025. By 2030, 1 billion people worldwide will need to be reskilled.

The upside of reducing the gap between available skills and market demands is attractive. Unemployment can be kept under control, bringing stability to societies, and it could add \$11.5 trillion to global GDP.

Besides, the demand for new skills could work to the advantage of the differently-abled who could help fill several roles.

The implications are clear: Reskilling and upskilling programs must be industrialised if society is to benefit from the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In addition, as the workforce composition changes to include a higher percentage of the differently-abled, skilling must cover areas such as emotional intelligence, collaboration and coordination, disability awareness and sensitivity.

Although regulatory requirements have forced increased attention to diversity, these areas can do with greater attention and corporate commitment.

Also Read: [Google announces Career Certificates in partnership with Coursera to boost digital skills](#)

For organisations working to build infrastructure and processes to meet skilling needs, such as the Wadhvani Foundation, the larger challenge is how to reskill the workforce at scale and within such a short cycle

Our concern is around reaching all parts of society, so there are no developmental imbalances. We want to ensure that in haste to roll out programmes; no one is left behind.

The problem is that employment markets are changing so fast that no one can be sent back to college for a three-year course hoping to acquire new and relevant skills.

By the time they graduate, the job markets would have changed. Therefore, the focus must be on "learn to learn" -- an essential life skill for the 21st-century adult -- that develops critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, allowing students to pick up new skills continuously.

One way to overcome the challenges of scale is to ensure that "learn to learn" programmes are provided -- while the pinpoint focus is brought to developing 21st-century core employability skills through mobile-based video content on the cloud, specially designed to improve an individual's chances of getting a job.

Simply learning new skills will not be adequate for future proof careers. Skills acquired today will quickly get outdated.

New technologies being incubated now-such as quantum computing-will drive further change.

Therefore, the content created for future learners must use a "learn to learn" philosophy that encourages and enables students to continuously reskill and improve their value in job markets.

(The author is Executive Vice President, Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation.)

WHY DO COMPANIES NEED TO BE MORE CONSUMER-CENTRIC THAN BRAND-CENTRIC?

INDIANtelevision | September 25, 2021

Read Online 

GUEST COLUMN: Why do companies need to be more consumer-centric than brand-centric?

Shift in consumer behaviour has heralded a change in the marketing mantra.

25 Sep, 2021 - 02:09 PM IST | By Atul Raja



Mumbai: Experts and professionals have long debated the merits of customer-centricity versus brand-centricity. I have to say that it's not one against the other; instead, both complement each other. With the fast-changing business landscape, the tenets of marketing and brand value have evolved equally fast. Back in the day, when outbound marketing was the primary method of outreach, it made sense to put brand-centricity at the core as the outbound efforts involved advertisements via radio, TV, and newspapers. Mainly, the brand decided what to communicate and how; there was limited two-way communication.

But with inbound marketing taking centre stage, the marketing processes, tools, and funnels are entirely different. Digital has changed the game completely. Companies cannot afford to ignore the sheer volume of inbound traffic and how it's suitable for the bottom line. Before making a purchase today, customers proactively

do their research, which involves search engines, social media, peer-to-peer conversations, and more. This shift in customer behaviour has heralded a change in the marketing mantra from brand push to brand pull, from brand-centricity to customer-centricity. In essence, brand efforts are now a sub-set of customer-centric marketing.

'Customers 2020: A Progress Report' by Waller talks about customer experience overtaking both price and product as the key brand differentiator. This is a validation of what marketers already know. Similarly, Forrester Research has consistently highlighted how we live in the 'Age of the Customer', where the customer experience with the brand is paramount, and obsession with the customer is a defining change as per Exhibit one.

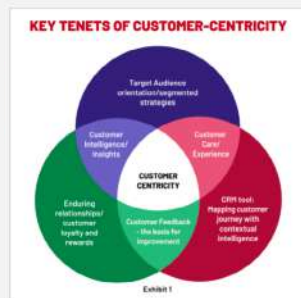


Exhibit 1

360-degree Customer Approach

To be truly customer-centric, it's vital to have a holistic end-to-end understanding of the customer by mapping the persona, buying patterns, and using marketing automation to listen to consumer preferences and leanings. In a nutshell, deep customer intelligence and insights should become the prime focus. Marketers today are increasingly warming up to the fact that higher levels of customer understanding translate into unprecedented levels of customer engagement.

360-degree Organisational Approach

For any enterprise, the target customer needs to be at the heart of its marketing strategy and part of its DNA. Firstly, inculcating a customer-centric approach needs to start with the leadership. Secondly, internal restructuring needs to be aligned with the customer segments and needs. Thirdly, success and outcome need to be measured using key consumer metrics like customer satisfaction (NPS scores), order and delivery timelines, etc.

360-degree Execution Approach

The mantra should be to execute flawlessly and address the customer's pain points, demands, and expectancies by analysing all available information. Take the example of a famous ketchup brand that acted expeditiously upon customer feedback highlighting the need for increased convenience in daily use. Exhibit two is self-explanatory.



Exhibit 2

360-degree Customer Care

Training customer service teams to be the 'best amongst the best' is critical. In many cases, the customer experience is closely driven by first-hand interaction with the customer care executive/line. Building systems and processes at an organisational level that allow a single customer view so that specific details pertaining to each customer can be accessed is the need of the hour. Also, such information should be made available to all functions for empowering and aligning them with the customer-centric strategy.

360-degree Customer Feedback

While the customer feedback is provided through multiple sources like customer care and sales teams, websites, survey questionnaires, google forms, social media, etc. it is imperative to address each through a carefully created repository backed by a tech-oriented query resolution and product development process. This forms the backbone of a customer-centric culture.

360-degree Content

Over the last few years, Google's search engine has shown a preference towards human-friendly content, ranking it higher than just content that hits all the right keywords. Therefore, the more humanised the content strategy, the more it will connect with the target audience. 360-degree content, hence, is people-centric and adds value to the product features and business-led articulation.

To sum up, customer-centricity is the bedrock for businesses and in many ways decides their fate in terms of 'Intention to Purchase (ITP)'. Brands, slogans, products, and media are only the spokes that help bridge the gap between the customer and the business and influence 'Top of the Mind Recall (TOMA)'.

In essence, the brand reality today is defined by its collated perceptions and insights of the customers. Having said this, customer-centricity is a lifelong approach and needs constant attention to changing customer/market needs, perceptions and expectancies.

(Atul Raja is executive vice president, global marketing at Wadhvani Foundation. The views expressed in the column are personal and Indiantelevision.com may not subscribe to them.)

A 'DIFFERENTIAL' MARKETING STRATEGY IS CRUCIAL FOR NOT-FOR-PROFITS

A BW BusinessWorld Publication | August 30, 2021


Read Online 

A 'Differential' Marketing Strategy Is Crucial For Not-For-Profits

How can non-profit organisations overcome challenges and create compelling and successful marketing strategies



30 August, 2021
By Atul Raja

 Print this article

In today's globalized business world, many non-profit organizations function like corporates in terms of policies and processes. Keeping the global Foundations aside, the sector faces unique challenges like budget constraints, unclear roadmap, and quality of talent.

In the *2020 Non-profit's Trend Report by Salesforce*, the most significant marketing challenges listed by 7000+ respondent marketers are three-fold: budget constraints, implementing large marketing programs and creating a message that consistently resonates with the audience. Another crucial challenge that came about was the sluggish technology adoption, due to which 75% of the respondents are not able to measure how well their marketing initiatives are performing, and 40% cited that they are not able to analyze the Return on Investment (ROI) and measure impact for their activities.

So how can non-profits overcome these challenges and create compelling and successful marketing strategies? While the twin pillars of productive operations, i.e., customer/beneficiary focus and data-based decision, remain common, **Exhibit 1** articulates the key parameters which define the need for a differential marketing strategy between for-profits and non-profits.

MARKETING DYNAMICS

For-Profit		Not-for-Profit
Outcome: Revenue	↔	Outcome: Impact
Mass Media	↔	Word of Mouth
Brand Equity	↔	Credibility
Consumer Focus	↔	Beneficiary Focus
Touching the Consumer	↔	Handholding the Beneficiary
Brand Loyalty is Paramount	↔	Thought Leadership is Critical
Rational based purchase decisions	↔	High Emotional Quotient

*Exhibit 1

It's all about impact

At the core of non-profit marketing is an unwavering focus on impact orientation, leading to two distinct approaches: (1) the communication encompasses the company's mission and values and (2) a clear demonstration of 'do as you say'. This is because the social objectives and impact creation are closely intertwined with the communication that showcases the non-profit brand.

The beneficiary is your biggest customer

The key tasks for non-profit marketing are to put the beneficiary as the centrepiece of the communication and for the communication to benefit the beneficiary in terms of awareness, resources, and access to knowledge repositories. In essence, the creatives and communication approach must be human centred with real-world human perspectives defining the relentless focus on people.

Credibility is your biggest asset

'Walk the talk' is an important criterion that goes a long way in enhancing the 'Trust Metric', resulting in legitimacy, effectiveness, and non-financial/financial support. This needs to be integrated into the non-profit communication as an underlying theme and doing so will result in enjoying a high degree of social, bureaucratic, and political capital.

Handholding is the 'memorable' brand experience

In the non-profit world, it is essential to partner with the beneficiary across the support life cycle. This is the cornerstone of sustainable impact. Handholding and proactively engaging with the beneficiary beyond the initial support will ensure enduring success. It also leads to assessing and measuring impact right till the last mile. The role of marketing is to showcase this last mile and measurable impact to create equity in the ecosystem as a serious player.

Thought leadership is akin to brand stewardship

Thought leadership is a long haul and needs to be worked upon assiduously and painstakingly to gain traction. This is a powerful tool that can open doors towards influencing policymakers, attracting resources and partners, and initiating a debate in the ecosystem. Public Relations (PR) and sharing of views in the opinion-making forums plays a crucial marketing-driven role here.

There is no competition, only partners

While substantial marketing efforts in the for-profit enterprises are concentrated towards addressing the competition landscape and gaining a competitive edge, the outlook is exactly the opposite in the not-for-profits. The ecosystem players here are not adversaries but a big asset in meeting common objectives. The approach in this sector is to constantly look out for like-minded organizations so that a handshake takes place in the interest of augmented impact. So, a key marketing objective is to identify and engage with stakeholders doing a stellar job in the space and run joint marketing programs.

It's passion vs salary – the MMM phenomena

The average employee in the not-for-profit space invariably wears passion on his sleeve and believes in giving with a smile, sharing knowledge unselfishly and constantly looking to create meaningful impact. Therefore, the MMM phenomena (Marketing Meets Mission) gives top priority to internal communications. It is imperative that the employees are energized, and marketing communication plays a crucial role in inspiring them towards the mission, vision, and goals.

For long, marketing has been a neglected feature in non-profit operations. But over the last five years, there has been a sea change in their outlook towards marketing. Leading non-profits are now hiring top-notch marketing talent, acknowledging their role in facilitating and meeting impact objectives.

The Author is Atul Raja, Executive Vice President, Global Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation

THE RISING SIGNIFICANCE OF BRANDING IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR

Financial Express | December 29, 2020

Read Online 

The rising significance of branding in the not-for-profit sector

December 29, 2020 6:00 AM

A non-profit brand strategy should focus on the brand as a strategic asset and necessarily drive cohesion and alignment to mission and objectives.



Non-profit branding is not just about the worldview of the brand but also how the ecosystem networks with your organisation.

By Atul Raja

A cursory glance at some of the leading global non-profits and foundations reveals a paradigm shift in the way these organisations look at their brand management. Competitive advantage is not a prime driver here, but it's the collaborations, networks and partnerships driven by a strong, empowered brand which plays an important role in the creation and engagement of like-minded communities.

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The non-profit brand is more inclusive as in this sector it's the mission, purpose and identity that speak the loudest and go on to create a strong platform for partnerships and networks that yield augmented impact. Therefore, a non-profit brand strategy should focus on the brand as a strategic asset and necessarily drive cohesion and alignment to mission and objectives, leverage internal capacity before undertaking outreach to engage external stakeholders.

Building a brand that helps a cause

Share of Voice (popularly known as SOV) is the buzzword in the FMCG and consumer durable space. However, in the absence of product lines, revenue orientation and big advertising budgets, branding in the not-for-profit space is anything but having the loudest voice in the market. It is more about building relationships and a community that believes in the same cause. Having worked for a no. of years in the non-profit space handling a global brand with high equity, here are my five mantras for building a durable, sustainable and leader brand in this sector.

Credibility is Paramount

Strong brand credentials are as important as the right and genuine intent to do social good. Earlier I spoke about the need to build a like-minded community and partnerships. High brand credibility will open the doors to this, and the best way to establish this is to "Be What You Are".

Honest, transparent communication without any over claims always works. The work being done and the impact it creates is told better through the experience of the beneficiaries than chest-thumping by the organisation itself. The substantive difference being made in the lives of some or many is the most solid foundation that any brand can aspire for.

Thought Leadership is Critical

Non-profit branding is not just about the worldview of the brand but also how the ecosystem networks with your organisation. Thought Leadership is all about being innovative, forward-thinking, leading with ideas and hence being a trendsetter. In essence, a thought leader brand is a bank of ideas and knowledge that is seen as a resource by its ecosystem.

The brand and communication strategy to achieve thought leadership has to be driven on certain tenets:

- always focus on the big idea
- have a tone of voice that inspires
- be data-focused with an empirical approach
- evoke debates and policy actions through concrete suggestions
- communicate in relevant forums
- be an opinion leader in the media
- create a community of the like-minded

Networking is Key

The world's leading non-profit brands wouldn't have been there today without having created strong networks. And these networks wouldn't have been formed without the power of the Brand.

The branding and communication strategy plays a significant role in facilitating high-performance networks and partnerships that have synergies and common grounds. I am a witness to the power of networking and how communication and the brand not just attract the ecosystem but also keep it glued together. The effective portrayal of the brand and its ethos online and on social media platforms is an effective way to reach out to ecosystem, communicate the vision and mission and energise those who co-relate with your ideas, activities and desire to make a difference.

Technology for Scale and Connects

It's an accepted fact that any significant scale-up is next to impossible without tech support. However, technology development can be an expensive and time-consuming process; therefore, this is not everyone's cup of tea and becomes a natural brand differentiator. Any non-profit that harbours technology as a pillar for its expanding goals should therefore highlight this (in varied forms) in its communication along with the specific benefits.

Storytelling is a Must

Non-profit branding and communication are all about education and inspiration. For the brand to resonate with the social cause and the target audience simultaneously, meaningful stories that strike a chord are the best way to win hearts and create lasting communities and partnerships. A strong narrative approach enables different stakeholders to remain invested in the brand.



The impact of a strong non-profit brand

It's not easy to turn a disinterested audience into loyal supporters. As a result, conventional form of brand building is now passe in the non-profit space, and there is a strong acknowledgement of the role that brand development can play in cultivating that much-desired extra-special bonding, and emotive connects which donors, partners, and internal stakeholders have with the mission of non-profits.

A strong non-profit brand means a strong capacity. When the brand identity and internal perceptions of a non-profit brand match with its external image, it means that both internal and external stakeholders are aligned with its values and mission. It also means that the branding and communication have done their task!

The author is an executive vice president – global marketing at Wadhvani Foundation

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN INDIA

ETHRWorld Contributor | December 20, 2020

Read Online 

Overcoming challenges facing women entrepreneurship in India

Women entrepreneurship is one of the largest possibilities and opportunities that India has to offer.

ETHRWorld Contributor · December 20, 2020, 15:55 IST



Atul Raja, Executive Vice President - Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation

By Atul Raja

Enterprises led by women grew to 20% from 14% in the last decade. And in the next few years, we will have 150 million students entering the workforce, out of which half are women. There have been numerous women icons like Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Ritu Kumar, Priya Paul, Ekta Kapoor who have set the bar

high and there is an increasing lot of young women entrepreneurs who are now in nationwide limelight for their achievements. Take Sanjana Patel of La Folie or Bhavna Juneja who leads Infinity and Feel M Powered, for instance. But these success stories of women entrepreneurship in India are few and far between, as compared to their male counterparts. And there are several reasons for this.

1. Lack of awareness: Most of you must have watched the film *English Vinglish*. There is a very powerful scene where the protagonist, Sashi, played by the late Sridevi whose speciality is her homemade 'laddoos' learns that she is an Entrepreneur. And that makes her feel so empowered! Like Sashi, many women in India don't even know that they are potential entrepreneurs and that they have immense power to contribute to the economy.

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2. Lack of exposure and inspiration: When it comes to growing their business, women don't have sufficient role models they can learn and get inspired from, and there is a gap in mentorship and networking to learn and replicate best practices. Of the women-owned enterprises, only 17% hire employees; the rest are single owned businesses. Also, around 10-30% of the reported women entrepreneurs are not run by women but are disguised as women-owned businesses.

3. Cultural inhibitors: Centuries of bias and conditioning have led to families being unsupportive of women entrepreneurs. Cultural practices like maternal parenting also restrict women to move away beyond motherhood and household duties making it difficult for them to invest their time and energies in building their business.

4. Financial constraints / Limited access to funds: In the case of woman entrepreneurs in India, the inability to provide tangible security to financial institutions to be able to secure loans is especially predominant. Also, the general perception still considers women as low-risk takers, and therefore, venture capital is difficult to obtain.

5. Lack of women in a diverse workforce: Urban entrepreneurs and full-fledged businesses in major cities face challenges around equal opportunity in finance, finding women as co-founders or navigating complex administrative processes as a fall out of the lack of inclusion.

6. Safety concerns: Lack of mobility due to safety concerns also hinders women entrepreneurs from meeting suppliers, travelling long distance or at night alone etc, making them work at lower than optimal efficiency.

Overcoming these challenges requires a series of socio-economic changes. As a country, we must start developing effective solutions that bridge the existing gaps and build key themes that will help the women entrepreneurship grow exponentially.

- **Policy changes** across rural and urban areas to build a framework that will accelerate women entrepreneurship. Currently, of all women owned businesses, only 14% are businesses across urban and rural that employ other people.

- **Closing the gender gap** through a more responsive financial sector. Also, build educative and simplified processes for the demographic that has not been exposed to knowledge. Financial literacy also needs urgent redressal.

- **Increase in networking and mentoring platforms for women.** This should include celebrating more women entrepreneurs and having formal and informal networks for women to learn and grow.

- **Encourage more woman investors** as they will, in turn, encourage more woman entrepreneurs due to a better understanding of the challenges.

- **Use of technology** to overcome the traditional barriers that woman face in terms of learning, networking, and access to finance.

India is full of opportunities, and the time has come where there is no holding back on the rise of woman entrepreneurship. The statistic that out of the 63 million MSMEs in India, only 6% are led by women entrepreneurs will not make any progressive individual proud. We cannot fritter away the vast talent pool of women, and it is high time we made a systematic effort to tap into and harness the untapped and massive potential of woman entrepreneurs who are a most precious resource for the country.

The author, Atul Raja, is Executive Vice President - Global Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation.

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SKILL INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA NEEDS AN URGENT UPGRADE

Education Times | October 26, 2020

Read Online 

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2020
www.educationtimes.com

Skill infrastructure in India needs an urgent upgrade

The country needs a combination of theory and training embedded in real-life work environment, writes Atul Raja



Over the last five years, a lot has been talked about India's looming demographic dividend and the need to leverage a young population with 12 to 14 million youth coming into the workforce every year. However, now it is time to get over the hype and get down to brass tacks.

While our aspiration is to make India the largest supplier of the workforce to the world, what do we do to make this happen? Two things for sure; first is to align capacity building to emerging industry needs, and the second is to ensure that the solutions are scalable and the investments required to scale are not linear. Translated, this means creating skilling programmes in sectors where the demand is going to be the highest.

So, what is the infrastructure required to meet these twin objectives? The skills infrastructure in India has been analysed in bits and pieces, whereas it requires holistic examination to arrive at a solution.

Policy infrastructure

NEP 2020 proposals have made giant strides towards creating a confluence of education and skills by integrating vocational education in middle and secondary schools. However, establishing skill labs at local polytechnics and acknowledging the 'digital' future of education, a strategic policy shift from 'Education to Employability' and 'Trainable to Employable' needs to percolate across the skills ecosystem and all the stakeholders. For example one of the ways in which the government can help is to review minimum wages for different skills and set up policies to recognise the skilled workers.

In order to raise large skilling facilities, Public-Private Participation (PPP) to develop appropriate standards, curriculum, faculty and certification processes is a must. While there is a PPP framework in place, its robust engagement and implementation with clearly designated roles and responsibilities is an urgent need.

Physical infrastructure

The current infrastructure is not geared to skill India's teeming millions. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Industrial Training

Centers (ITCs) and other government-affiliated institutes are woefully short in quantity and quality to create an army of job-ready, industry-ready individuals armed with 'new-age' job skills.

Knowledge infrastructure

In both the manufacturing and services sectors, there is a gross mismatch between skills that employers expect due to a marked disconnect with what academia is producing. Therefore, the knowledge imparted through the current skilling framework needs an overhaul.

India needs the dual training system, a combination of theory and training embedded in a real-life work environment. This requires close cooperation between industry and academia, formalised and regulated by law. An ideal model to implement this would be that ownership of training is taken up by the industry while that of curriculum design, examination, and testing are undertaken by the skills institutes with inputs from the industry.

Technology infrastructure

The post-COVID normal will be a digital world, and our education systems need to absorb this reality. Inexpensive and scalable technology such as cloud-based learning programmes, open-source software to create engaging and immersive modules for self-paced learning and mobile networks for anytime-anywhere distribution to larger audiences will be key to skilling India for the future.

Financing infrastructure

Government funding cannot be the only route for financing the vocational education infrastructure. There is a need for industries to participate in the workforce learning process, and learners to be provided with means to finance themselves.

The skilling infrastructure in India, therefore, needs to create a unique ecosystem of government, employers and the vocational training apparatus working in sync with each other to make India a global HR powerhouse.

(The author is executive vice president, Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation)

MAGZTER

A new generation of start-ups

We are now witnessing a paradigm shift with entrepreneurship fast becoming the first-choice career for our best and brightest, and start-up successes inspiring a new generation of Indians, says ATUL RAJA

It is an interesting reflection. When I was growing up, and perhaps till a decade back, many of the career aspirations were decided by one set of parents proudly proclaiming, "My son will become an engineer or a doctor". The other set would tell you, "We are not Tata or Birla. Study hard to get into a job from where you can retire". Indians were traditionally risk-averse when it came to career choices.

However, the situation today has turned on its head, and we sure have come a long way. The fact that India needs job creators and not job seekers isn't lost on anyone, including the youth. We are now witnessing a paradigm shift with entrepreneurship fast becoming the first-choice career for our best and brightest, and startup successes inspiring a new generation of Indians. This has mainly been due to a significant shift in the way Entrepreneurship Education is now being imparted at campuses. The new trends in Entrepreneurship Education are experiential and focused on 'learning by doing'.

Mainstreaming entrepreneurship course with credits: Educational Institutions which are serious about creating a culture of entrepreneurship at their campus are mainstreaming the course with credits and bringing in an evangelist faculty for the same. This has gone a long way in generating more interest in entrepreneurship amongst students.

Project-based learning: The course is now less theoretical and focused on out-of-the-class and out-of-the-book approach — validating the start-up idea, how to create business models, understand the nuances of Minimum Viable Product (MVP), do's and don'ts before starting up etc. are real-time scenarios ensuring that startups of tomorrow begin on the right footing.

Exposure to industry experts, mentors and entrepreneurs: It is widely acknowledged that the best teachers of entrepreneurship are entrepreneurs themselves who have dirtied their hands,



faced myriad challenges and done it all. While industry experts give an outlook of the various facets of the business, the entrepreneurs give a first-hand feel of what's to come in the entrepreneurial journey.

Practice ventures: Practice ventures by students lay a clear roadmap for venture creation and build entrepreneurial muscle. A number of startups have arisen from campus ventures as they provide real-world learning into business planning, customers, markets, revenue, competition and funding.

Design thinking: Innovation and Entrepreneurship are two sides of the same coin. Fostering innovative thinking through creative and collaborative workflows helps to facilitate prototyping and discovery of new solutions.

The new entrepreneurship education trends at the campus are fostering innovation and experimentation through hands-on experiential learning and providing an opportunity to budding startups for building and executing the business idea, learning to challenge the status quo, and developing a risk-taking mindset. More importantly, this will go a long way in grooming a new generation of educated and robust startups who are more aware of the pitfalls that lead to failure and hence, will maximise their success rate.

We are looking at a future where our entrepreneurs will be heroes much like the Bollywood stars and cricketers.

The writer is Executive Vice President, Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation

GENDER DIVERSITY: THE SECRET WEAPON FOR AN ORGANIZATION'S SUCCESS

Business Insider | September 29, 2020

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Gender Diversity: The secret weapon for an organization's success

GUEST AUTHOR | SEP 29, 2020, 14:18 IST

A shift towards a more gender-balanced organization requires structural and systemic change.

- It is universally acknowledged that bridging the gender gap in India is not just a dire need, but a herculean task.
- Atul Raja, Executive Vice President - Global Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation writes why it is important to build an inclusive work culture.

For long, organizations have ignored the value, importance and power play of gender diversity despite many studies postulating that teams with a 'balanced' gender mix perform significantly better on critical parameters like revenue and growth.

Gender Diversity in India



In India, gender diversity bias is even more predominant. As per the 'DivHERsity Benchmarking Report 2019' which studied gender diversity in the Indian workplace across 300+ companies, only a quarter of India's workforce is female. This is corroborated by the 'India Skills Report 2018' that puts the economic participation of women in the workforce at 23% in 2018, a disconcerting fall from 32% in 2016.

It is universally acknowledged that bridging the gender gap in India is not just a dire need, but a herculean task loaded with multiples challenges like work-family balance, choice of job profiles, work-place conditions and most importantly a mindset and attitudinal change.

With India ranked 142 out of 149 countries in the economic opportunity and participation of women index (as per The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 of WEF), there needs to be concerted effort to increase India's female labour force participation closer to the global average of 49%.

Benefits of a Gender-balanced Workforce

The nascent gender diversity across most companies in India has seen many roles such as oil and gas, manufacturing, construction and engineering with a male skew. On the flip side, there are also traditionally female-dominated jobs, such as elementary education and nursing. This is a glaring gap as global research, surveys and data-points clearly exhibit that companies which practice greater gender diversity have reported inherent benefits as they fully leverage and utilize the talent available:

- *Improved financials and profitability:* women in leadership positions, mixed-gender boards and pervasive presence across the rank and file have yielded better financial performance.
- *A better 'employer brand' perception:* a progressive and positive reputation will attract the best talent.
- *Employee retention:* inclusive culture is a booster for motivation and morale.
- *A loyal and broadened customer base:* a diverse talent pool makes it easier to attract an increasingly diverse customer base.
- *A quality-focused shift:* since diverse teams are more creative and better at problem-solving, a better gender-mix signifies the shift from quantity to quality.

Creating Greater Gender Diversity

There has to be a clear distinction between gender diversity and gender equality. Gender diversity doesn't mean a 50:50 mix of males and females across the organization but a fair representation of both sexes and the critical fact that the hiring team should have an open mind for any openings without assumptions or prejudices.

A shift towards a more gender-balanced organization requires structural and systemic changes:

1. *A shift in the 'human capital' strategy:* the diversity strategy to be strongly intertwined with the recruiting strategy e.g. removal of gender-coded words from job descriptions and postings.
2. *Internal Communications thrust:* an internal mindset build-up is essential to begin on the right footing and to shake-up any pre-conceived notions.
3. *Leaders to be champions of diversity:* creating an open, inclusive culture.
4. *Women Leadership Programs :* developing an internal pipeline as a 'walk the talk' showcase both internally and externally.
5. *A balanced pay and benefits structure:* robust, family-oriented perks that account for any 'unintentional' bias.

Small steps at organizational and employer levels can prove to be a great national asset. As per a McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report titled, "The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific", addressing the gender parity issues could lead to 18% higher GDP for India, i.e. \$770 billion by 2025. So, if we are able to bring more women into the workforce, the potential for impact is immense, transformational and with far reaching implications.

- By Atul Raja, Executive Vice President - Global Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation

THE IMPORTANCE OF STARTUPS INNOVATING AND PIVOTING IN COVID TIMES

The News Minute | August 20, 2020

Read Online



The importance of startups innovating and pivoting in COVID times

The COVID-19 pandemic may be a long-term one, but even if it isn't, it has forever changed the way startups will do business in the future.



ATOM | STARTUPS | THURSDAY, AUGUST 20, 2020 - 18:28

By Atul Raja

It is a known fact that any crisis spurs innovation. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is unparalleled and needs to be looked upon with a different lens. While the pandemic has had a debilitating impact across most industries and sectors, startups and small businesses were worst hit. As a result, nearly 40% of startups in India have faced temporary closure due to the pandemic, and this may become permanent in many cases. The situation is likely to be accentuated by estimates that 70% of startups have less than three months of cash runway.

However, there is a silver lining in every crisis with the potential to turn adversity into opportunity. Taking a step back, let us analyse the fact that around 90% of Indian startups fail in any case. The most important reason for the failure of Indian startups is the lack of innovation coupled with the lack of a widespread support ecosystem. There is a dearth of new technologies, top-notch technical talent, investment in R&D or unique business models.



So, despite the distress, the pandemic has provided a once-in-a-lifetime and a forced opportunity to startups to understand the newly emerging market and consumer demands and pivot quickly to meet the same through change and innovation and building systems and processes to scale with new business models and products. With business continuity and growth at tremendous risk, leveraging innovation will be the game-changer. As a result, many startups today are innovating and changing business plans to cater to new market demands arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pivot - the new catchphrase in the startup ecosystem

As per a Nasscom 2020 survey, 54% of the startups are now looking at new opportunities and business models to stay afloat, survive the current crisis and stabilize. Growth is only an afterthought right now.

Pivoting is not necessarily about reinventing the business model. It makes business sense to pivot in the same or similar categories and possibly get into product extensions.

A couple of days back, I was talking to Vikram Khinwasara, co-founder of 'The Yellow Straw', a fresh juice startup from Kolkata and he explained to me how a product extension from fresh juice to raw fruits worked for him in the COVID crisis.

Let's take the example of some other well-known startups. 'Cure.fit' shut down its core business of gyms & health clinics across India and focused on digital yoga classes which generated substantial revenues. Similarly, 'Licious' with internal delivery manpower for meat supply switched to delivery by logistics providers like Yulu and Shadowfox resulting in a revival of business.

Then there are startups which have actually incubated in COVID times, with COVID-led solutions. Take for example IIT Madras incubated startup, 'Muse Wearables', which coats textiles with nanoparticles-based antimicrobial agents that can 'inactivate' Corona Virus on contact.

There are numerous other COVID-led solutions being launched by startups like contactless parking, air sanitisation of centrally air-conditioned malls, hygiene analytics, suspect tracing etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic may be a long-term one, but even if it isn't, it has forever changed the way startups will do business in the future. A recent survey by McKinsey and Company of more than 200 cross-sector companies, aptly summarizes the mood when more than 90% of the respondents say that they expect the fallout from COVID-19 to fundamentally change the way business is conducted. In the short-term, the startups will have to ensure liquidity and slow-down of the burn rate while in the long-run, pivoting to the all-new sunrise verticals like healthcare, and emerging tech like AI, IoT, Cloud, videoconferencing, gaming and OTT platforms, streaming, online education, grocery delivery and e-pharmacies, seems to be a viable survival option due to unsustainable unit economics and high cash burn.

While resilience and adaptive measures to survive and thrive is important for startups, innovation will be a critical factor in building resiliency, improving outcomes and tackling business downturn.

Views expressed are author's own

Atul Raja is Executive Vice President - Marketing at Wadhvani Foundation

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कोविड-19 के बाद रोजगार सृजन करना बेहद जरूरी

Dainik Bhaskar | August 19, 2020

Read Online 

जानकारी

वाधवानी फाउंडेशन भारत में उद्यमशीलता का शुभसंदेश देने वाला अग्रदूत रहा है

कोविड-19 के बाद रोजगार सृजन करना बेहद जरूरी

मालक वजूज

नई दिल्ली। कोविड 19 के बाद देश में रोजगार और व्यापार को लेकर जो हालात पैदा हुए हैं उनका क्या निदान है और कैसे इन हालात से बेहतर तरीके से निबटा जा सकता है बता रहे हैं। वाधवानी फाउंडेशन के मार्केटिंग कार्यकारी उपाध्यक्ष अतुल राजा।

सवाल: भारत के आर्थिक विकास के लिए आवश्यक उद्यमशीलता को बढ़ावा देने में वाधवानी फाउंडेशन की क्या भूमिका है?
वाधवानी फाउंडेशन भारत में उद्यमशीलता का शुभसंदेश देने वाला अग्रदूत रहा है। लगभग दो दशक पूर्व वाधवानी फाउंडेशन ने "नेशनल आंतरप्रैन्सर नेटवर्क

(एनआईएन) की शुरुआती पहल की। जिसके तहत पूरे देश के कैम्पसों में युवाओं को उद्यमी बनने की शिक्षा और प्रोत्साहन दिया गया। आज अक्की खबर यह है कि उद्यम सर्वश्रेष्ठ और सबसे प्रतिभावानों की पहली परसंद है। इनमें आईआईटी के फ्रैजुरेंट भी शामिल हैं और टियर 2 शहरों में भी इसका चलन बढ़ रहा है। वाधवानी एनआईएन विद्यार्थियों को निरंतर ज्ञान एवं कौशल विकास के कोर्स और स्टार्ट-अप लैब्स के माध्यम से उनका सशक्तिकरण करता है ताकि अधिक क्षमता वाले स्टार्ट-अप बनें। कोविड 19 संकट से उबरने के लिए फाउंडेशन ने



हाल में 200 करोड़ रु. की 'सहायता' पहल की है ताकि एसरएमई को उनका कारोबार बचाने, पैर जमाने और काम बढ़ाने की सलाह के रूप में मदद मिले और वे 100,000 रोजगार सृजन करें।

सवाल: सरकार

उद्यमशीलता के इकोसिस्टम को और क्या सहायता और मजबूती प्रदान कर सकती है?
वैश्विक महामारी कोविड 19 से पंगु हो गए भारतीय स्टार्टअप इकोसिस्टम में दुबारा जान डालने की जरूरत है। नैसर्कॉम के हाल के सर्वे बताते हैं कि 40 प्रतिशत स्टार्टअप या तो फिलहाल बंद हैं या बंद होने की कगार पर हैं और 70

प्रतिशत के पास तीन महीने से कम के लिए नकद बचा है। स्थिति बंद से बदतर हो रही है। इसलिए सरकार को न केवल इकोसिस्टम विकसित करने बल्कि मौजूदा इकोसिस्टम के घटकों को दुबारा बनाने पर सोचना होगा और इसके तरीके निकालने होंगे। नीतिगत उपाय करने होंगे ताकि ग्राहकों की मांग बढ़े क्योंकि निकट भविष्य में नीतिगत प्रोत्साहन नहीं मिलने से ग्राहक के सेंटिमेंट में सुधार की संभावना नहीं दिखती है।

स्टार्टअप को कारोबार और रोजगार कायम रखने में सहायक स्क्रीम चाहिए अन्यथा वे कारोबार ठप्प होने की वजह से कई बुनियादी कर्मचारियों को कायम रखने में नाकाम रहेंगे।

सवाल: अधिक से अधिक रोजगार सृजन और इनोवेशन के लिए सरकार के विभिन्न प्रयास क्या हो सकते हैं?

हालांकि भारत में रोजगार सृजन के अलग-अलग टूटिकोण हैं और सुझावों की भी कमी नहीं है। लेकर रिफॉर्म (श्रम सुधार): लेकर रिफॉर्म और रोजगार सृजन में फरकर बहुत प्रगाढ़ संबंध है। इन सुधारों में एक सबसे महत्वपूर्ण घटक नियंत्रण समाप्त करना है क्योंकि श्रम कानून में लचीलापन के साथ पूंजी एवं उत्पादन के मुख्य आर्थिक सूचकांकों के तालमेल से रोजगार सृजन का मजबूत आधार बनेगा। स्किल सप्लाय चैन के इस तरह टूटने की समस्या का एक ही उपाय है - वर्कफोर्स को इंडस्ट्री के हिसाब

से नए स्किल सेट दिए जाएं। फंड, कार्य और कार्यकारी के विकेदीकरण से आम जनता तक लाभ फूँटने के बाद ही अधिक खुशहाली और रोजगार सृजन में बढ़ोतरी होगी।

सवाल: आज के दौर में कौशल विकास के लिए भागीदारी क्यों महत्वपूर्ण है?
भारतीय कौशल विकास परिदृश्य के दो आंकड़े अधिक अहम दिखते हैं: भारत दुनिया की सबसे युवा आबादी वाले देशों में एक है। इसकी 54 प्रतिशत से अधिक आबादी 25 वर्ष से कम की है और 66 प्रतिशत से अधिक आबादी वर्किंग एज ग्रुप (15-59 वर्ष) की है। इस टैंड को देखते हुए भारत के 2027 तक दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा वर्कफोर्स होने की संभावना है।

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND VS DEMOGRAPHIC DISASTER

Business World | July 15, 2020

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Demographic Dividend vs Demographic Disaster

Like

More than 54% of its population is below 25 years of age and over 66% of the population in the working-age group (15-59 years), as per a recent report.



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15 July, 2020
by Atul Raja

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India is a nation with one of the youngest population profiles. More than 54% of its population is below 25 years of age and over 66% of the population in the working-age group (15-59 years), as per a recent SRS report. On the other hand, the India Skills Report estimates that ~12 million youth between the age brackets of 15-29 years, will enter India's labor force every year over the next two decades. So, the country's population is expected to bulge in the 15-59 age group over the next decade. This demographic advantage is predicted to last only until 2040. India, therefore, has a narrow time frame to harness its demographic dividend and to overcome its skill shortages.

Bridging the demand-supply gap of skilled labor

While there seems to be a great demographic opportunity, it presses an alarm button, as there is currently a severe shortage of a well-trained, skilled workforce. Millions entering into the workforce are far outpacing the no. of jobs being created. It has been widely estimated that only 2.3% of the workforce in India has undergone formal skill training as compared to 68% in the UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in the US, 80% in Japan, and 96% in South Korea. So, if we do not bridge the demand-supply gap of labor, especially skilled labor, then a massive wave of unemployment could leave India floundering.

Underinvestment in education for employability

One of the key reasons for the wide skill training gap, is the marked disconnect between what academia is producing and what the industry needs. The world has transformed, but education in India hasn't with a largely static curriculum ignoring the relentless advances in technology and new-age learning needs on mobile technologies, AI, Machine Learning, green energy, drone technology etc.

With 95% of graduates' unemployable and nearly 80% of new entrants to the country's workforce getting little or no opportunity for skills education, we seem to have underinvested in education for employability. As a result, a large section of Indian population needs to be skilled, reskilled and upskilled.

This is corroborated by the Global Talent Shortage Survey 2018 of the Manpower Group, where 63% of employers in India say that they are having difficulty in filling jobs. With such an acute talent shortage, employers are challenged towards productivity and output. A fracture in the skills supply chain could disrupt India's plans of manufacturing dominance.

Soft skills for hard results

Soft skills or workplace skills or employability skills, are globally touted as the next big thing in the skilling domain. In today's dynamic work environment, advanced soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, digital literacy etc. are given top prominence by employers as technical skills can be acquired and taught but soft skills are alien to traditional education and have more to do with character, relationships and personality.

A study by researchers from Boston College, Harvard University, and the University of Michigan found that soft skills training, like communication and problem-solving, boosts productivity and retention by 12 percent and delivers a 250 percent return on investment.

According to Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends report, executives now consider soft skills as important to fostering employee retention, improving leadership, and building a meaningful culture. 92% of Deloitte's respondents rated soft skills as a critical priority.

LinkedIn's 2019 Global Talent Trends report shows that 92% of talent professionals and hiring managers say that soft skills are just as important—or more important—than hard technical skills. The report concludes that 57% of talent professionals struggle to assess soft skills. According to a survey by Talent Q, nine in 10 employers believe that graduates with soft skills will become increasingly important.

Perhaps one of the only soft skill surveys in India was done by Wadhvani Foundation, wherein 1100 employers spread over eight cities rated soft skills vs hard skills, and 85% of the employers said that they will be willing to pay a premium of 10-20% for a prospect equipped with desired soft skills than otherwise.

Dual VET - Vocational Education and Training

The German vocational education and training system, also known as the dual training system, is a gold standard in creating an industry-ready, job-ready workforce through a professionally implemented combination of theory and training embedded in a real-life work environment. We need to learn and implement the following best practices:

- Firmly established vocational education and training in the education system
- Cooperation between industry and academia to be regulated by law
- The model to be owned by the industry, the standards and exams also set by it, and not by any other body
- Training, testing, and certificates to be standardized in all industries

China, Japan, Brazil, and Singapore, who had similar challenges in the past have adopted inspired models to successfully bridge the skill gaps and ensure the employability of their youth. This dual apprenticeship system is vital for a successful and smooth transition from student life to a work environment, thus creating a skilled workforce in big numbers that India so direly needs. We need to treat such disruptions in our education system as a prerequisite for a successful economy.

Going by the trends, India is likely to have the world's largest workforce by 2027. It is important that we disrupt our old school education system with increased expenditure on education and training and by integrating new-age, industry-led skilling programs that successfully transition the youth of today into a champion workforce of tomorrow.

There lies a great opportunity to leverage our demographic dividend as an unprecedented resource for wealth creation that will outpace much of the world as a global HR powerhouse. The mantra should be to "Build your skills, not your resume". Education will not ensure employment. Skilling will.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the article above are those of the authors' and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of this publishing house.

IMPORTANT TO SET UP A MSME-COVID RESPONSE TASK FORCE

Business World | May 27, 2020

Read Online 

Important to set up a MSME-COVID Response Task Force: Atul Raja

The MSME sector will have to bear the brunt of the biggest impact as COVID-19 rips across people and the economy writes Atul Raja, Executive Vice President- Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation.



27 May, 2020
by EE News Desk

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The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is often described as the backbone of the Indian economy employing ~120 million and responsible for ~45% of exports. About 20% of the MSMEs are based in rural areas and despite the odds and lack of adequate economic and technical support, the MSME sector has shown a consistent growth of over 10%. COVID-19 could break the MSME backbone given that the manufacturing of textiles, furniture, electronic components, hotel services, etc., has come to a grinding halt. The pandemic, with no end in sight at the moment, could threaten 40% of total GDP that is generated by the MSME sector. If anything can propel the Indian economy to its target of \$5 trillion by 2025, it is the MSMEs. The nation cannot afford a catastrophic breakdown in the MSME sector and must act with urgency.

The government has been quick to respond with measures to ensure that payments to MSMEs do not remain frozen during the lockdown. For example, it asked the NHAI to release payments for contractor bills to the tune of Rs 25,000 crores. Public sector companies have also been instructed to settle vendor bills without procedural delay. This, of course, partly takes care of wages but does nothing to revive demand or put the MSME workforce back into production.

So far the RBI has instructed banks to allow a moratorium on term loans, deferred interest payment on working capital and public sector banks have extended emergency credit lines of up to Rs 50 lakhs (or 10% of existing working capital limits) under the IND-MSE COVID Emergency Loan with a tenure of 60 months and zero processing fee. An IND COVID Emergency Salary Loan can be availed equivalent of 20 times the latest gross monthly salary with a cap of Rs 2 lakhs. SIDB has announced concessional rates for loans that will be issued in 48 hours with minimal paper work for those providing emergency products and services related to the battle against COVID-19. In addition, the GoI has allowed MSMEs to delay payment of GST until June 2020 without penalty. One supposes that bill discounting on various platforms will also be enabled and power and water bills will be deferred along with property tax payment.

One of the reasonably fast measures the government can take is to launch an intelligent mobile app that allows MSMEs to upload the required documents to access credit lines, tax breaks and loans. The app should use Robotic Process Automation (RPA) at the back end to read the documents, run the extracted data past an AI engine to match it with various data bases, use the data to complete forms and directly approve loans/ relief measures and release payments into the accounts of the MSME practically overnight. The goal should be to minimize paperwork, the dependence on application scrutiny by human teams that can cause damaging delay, eliminate the need to access bank and government websites to avail the financial assistance using desktops, and deliver funds using zero-touch online processes.

Given the number of jobs endangered in the MSME sector, the priority should be to bring them back on stream as quickly as possible by (this must have equal priority as making funds available to MSMEs):

- Boosting healthcare facilities around zones that have significant MSME activity
- Ramping up education around social distancing, healthcare tips and awareness using online videos distributed over mobiles
- Creating, implementing and supervising back-to-production protocols and processes
- Setting up MSME-specific COVID-19 service desks that use chatbots and are available online as well as over IVR to provide information related to the pandemic and the fiscal assistance they can avail of (basically, zero-manpower call centers)

Also, it is extremely important to set up a MSME-COVID Response Task Force. This should have industry, government and banking representation. The remit of the task force should be two-fold: First, draw up plans that bring MSMEs to a back-to-production mode; second, create a blueprint for action once the virus is brought under control and market demand returns to normal levels. Many MSMEs will not have access to capital and labor required to get back to 100% production levels for quite some time. Can innovative pathways be created such as investments into their businesses from existing buyers or an industry consortium? Can a technology-driven, scalable, centralized Human Resource service, that works to revive the MSME labor force, be provided? These services can be made available online/ over mobile using remote collaboration technology in a bid to hasten the return to normalcy.

The MSME sector will have to bear the brunt of the biggest impact as COVID-19 rips across people and the economy. In this extra-ordinary circumstance, a variety of aid packages and technology-driven low-cost functional assistance can be the mitigating factor between MSMEs and full impact of COVID-19.

Soft skills can deliver hard results

Why 21st century employability skills, or soft skills, are critical for knowledge economies



Atul Raja

THE ANNUAL EMPLOYABILITY Survey 2019 by Aspiring Minds, the talent evaluation company, has revealed that 80% of Indian engineers are not fit for any job in the knowledge economy—and India has 760 universities, it's the third-largest higher education system in the world! The massive skills gap is going to cost us in more ways than one. While the future of these graduates is at risk, it is estimated the skills gap can cost India \$1.97 trillion in GDP growth over the next decade.

Recent employer surveys by Wadhvani Foundation have also revealed a critical hiring differentiator—employers demand a lot more than just a degree. They are looking for specific employability (soft) skills that go a long way in contributing to workplace success in an environment that is more demanding, more complex, more



collaborative, and more diverse than ever before.

Feedback from employers in India points towards eight employability skills as most critical and in tune with 21st century workplace demands, i.e. communication, self-management, customer centricity, teamwork, digital literacy, problem-solving, market awareness and entrepreneurial mindset.

These core employability skills should be embedded in all education and training through methodologies that encourage experiential learning.

So, why are employability skills fast

Eight important soft skills are teamwork, communication, self-management, customer centricity, digital literacy, problem-solving, market awareness and entrepreneurial mindset.

gaining importance?

Employers are realising the substantial impact that employability skills can have on the capabilities of hires, giving them an edge. These skills enable individuals to continually acquire new-age trends in a dynamic business environment where lifelong learning is critical and quick adaptation to technological change and organisational restructuring is a must.

HR managers are increasingly looking for skills beyond the existing 3R (Reading, writing and arithmetic) model that the Indian education system follows. Also,

graduates are expected to be upskilling on a regular basis to transfer essential skills from one occupation to another.

For organisational efficiency, 21st century graduates need to function independently in roles that require problem-solving and decision-making. This may entail strategies to improve production, service, product, etc., through demonstrated creativity and flexibility in approach. Hence, being proficient in soft skills is important for a candidate/employer to be industry-ready and job-ready, with a range of interpersonal and managerial skills to improve collaboration and productivity.

Recent data insights from SkillSurvey corroborate the rising influence of soft skills in the corporate world.

■ 77% of employers believe that soft skills are as important as hard ones;

■ 67% of HR managers will hire candidates with strong soft skills even if their hard skills are weak;

■ 43% of HR managers cite cultural fit (due to soft skills) as the single-most determining factor for a new hire;

■ 46% of new hires fail in the first 18 months, usually due to lack of soft skills.

With new technologies, global competitiveness and the redesign of the workplace into a flexible high-performance work environment, sector-agnostic core and professional skills to improve employability and expand career opportunities are fast gaining prominence.

The author is executive vice-president, Wadhvani Foundation



CHICKEN AND EGG: ONLY NATIONS THAT FOCUS ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FAST TRACK THEIR ECONOMIC GROWTH

Time of India Editorial | November 22, 2018

Read Online 

Chicken and egg: Only nations that focus on human development fast track their economic growth

Atul Raja



If you were given a chance to choose between human development and economic growth, what would you choose? We instinctively realise that human development should take precedence. Human development allows us to increase the choices we have that enable us to lead longer, healthier and fuller lives. Making the connection and distinction between economic growth and human development is important for India where a wrong choice can alter the developmental future of the nation.

There is ample research to show that the two are linked. But different nations have defined their way to differing priorities. Many nations have realised that it is necessary to raise economic resources through growth in order to fund human development. But across nations, those that have done this have become victims of low growth in a vicious self-reinforcing cycle: the unskilled labour has pushed them further into a hapless downward spiral. The reverse appears to work better. Nations

that focus on human development fast track their economic growth.

By examining the priorities that India has, we can predict the future. Budget 2017-18 reveals the trend. The government had allocated Rs 3,686 crore for education. As a percentage of the total budget, it doesn't look particularly healthy. In 2000, India spent 4.1% of GDP on education. This has slowly shrunk to between 3.5 and 4.0% across the last decade. Last year,

Something is going wrong, otherwise 48% of Indian employers would not be worried that there is a talent shortage

the figure was 3.7%. Compare this to other countries such as Brazil which have improved spends from 3.0% in 2000 to 5.3% in 2011. China that has gone from 2.8% in 2000 to 4.3% in 2011. It is evident that India is falling behind other nations. It may not have the skilled workforce required to fuel economic growth.

There is a need to address the issues around skill development



urgency. Several initiatives have been launched. One of them is the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015, a framework for skilling India at scale and with speed without sacrificing standards and ensuring the initiative remains a sustainable endeavour. The policy is linked with existing educational infrastructure, focused on building qualified trainers, and developing innovations in the skill development space.

The real need is to bring the service sector (financial services, transportation, hospitality, tourism, education, facilities management, real estate etc) under the lens of

human development. Services have become the growth propellant of the nation, drawing foreign investments, contributing to exports and providing employment on a significant scale. The sector is responsible for 55.6% of India's Gross Value Added and employed 28.6% of the population. Net service exports stood at \$2.7 billion in Q1 2018-19.

Despite the growth in services, here is the paradox: Employer's can't fill in positions due to the lack of the right skills.

The number of young people entering the labour market is on the increase: 60% of India's population is already in the working age group. According to the National

Higher Education Commission, the average age of the population by 2020 will be 29 years (against 30 for the US, 46 for Europe and 47 for Japan). But employers are unable to find appropriately skilled manpower. Something is going wrong, otherwise 48% of Indian employers would not be worried that there is a talent shortage.

That is why industry leaders are exploring new models to find and employ talent. Amongst these are part-timers, mentors, project based contracts and bounty-wages. According to PeopleStrong, India will see 18.2% of its workforce in project based jobs. These are signals for a human development strategy that needs to address this edge.

The developments suggest that India must turn around its human development story. There is a desperate need for a pool of skilled talent to take advantage of the services opportunity. In addition, India can export its skilled workforce to meet the needs in other parts of the world that are also beset for a skills deficit. The clock is ticking. Any delay will result in missing the boat.

The writer is Executive Vice President at Wadhvani Foundation.

WHY CREATING JOBS IS THE SILVER BULLET TO SOLVING INDIA'S MANY DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES

Time of India Editorial | August 28, 2018

Read Online



Why creating jobs is the silver bullet to solving India's many developmental challenges

Atul Raja



The Arab Spring, the uprising that rapidly spread through the Middle East in 2010-11, can be attributed to long simmering discontent resulting from upward employment. When the Arab Spring was triggered, each country that young Egyptians and Tunisians was unemployed. Close home, we have seen the results of unemployment bubble over many times.

In 2004, just a week long agitation in north India, is estimated to have resulted in economic loss of between Rs 1000 to Rs 1,00,000 crore – providing a realistic view of what can happen when inability to find job matching education undertaken is a big issue today. The nation's education system seems to have created an army of unemployable graduates, leading to insecurity and unemployment. This scenario has repeated itself in the last couple of years.

While India's economy has been growing, job creation has not kept pace. Unemployment has been on the rise. The results of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) India Economic Survey 2017 reflect this. According to the

survey's findings, more than 87% of Indians in the 15 to 24 years age group were not employed. In March 2016, the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy made unemployment figures more tangible. CMIE found that there were about 31 million unemployed youth in India as of February 2016. In relation, job creation in 2016 was estimated to be around 60,000.

For India, this presents a serious threat to economic

The gulf between haves and have-nots will increase if newer job opportunities are not created

development and to the very foundation of our democracy. On the other hand, it is equally evident that employment generation is the silver bullet to solving the developmental challenges faced by India.

Creating employment solves three major problems it addresses: social unrest and crime; poverty and hunger; health and wellbeing. These are key factors responsible for quality of life. They determine the stability of a nation. Social unrest: The stark contrast of the India Risk Survey re-



lated by PricewaterhouseCoopers and FICCI ranked 'Tensions, Closure and Unrest' as the major risk affecting the Indian economy. Businesses are naturally concerned. Job creation is the solution to the problem. Jobs bring people together, allow everyone to experience new ideas, build self-esteem and increase trust between people. More importantly a job brings citizens into conscious stakeholders in the future, driving stability. Poverty and hunger: The International Food Policy Research Institute's Global Hunger Index ranks India at number 100 (with 116 countries in the index). This is the impact of unemployment. In 2015 around 179 million people, or 14.4% of the population, con-

tinued to live in poverty (defined as the ability to live on less than \$1.25 a day). With no social security and a complete dependence on public handouts, the only escape route for them is through employment. With the rapid growth in GDP, the gulf between haves and have-nots will increase if newer job opportunities are not created. Health and wellbeing: There is a direct relationship between unemployment, poverty and health. Poverty and poor health reinforce unemployment, triggering a downward spiral. Long term unemployment results in loss of skills, erosion of the professional network, strengthening the perception of being unemployable and brings inevitable depression. This can rapidly escalate from the inability to pay

for medical insurance or address family healthcare needs. It is essential that early steps be taken to break the unemployment-poverty-health cycle by creating programmes that make the unemployed productive – so that they can access regular income, pay health and contribute to GDP.

If viable employment opportunities are created, families will be incentivised to invest in education. The rewards can be substantial. The World Bank says that each additional year of education has the power to increase wages by 10%. In addition, policy makers must bear in mind that the traditional approaches to job markets have taken a dramatic turn, making the newer thinking. For example, the informal sector is giving birth to a new breed of successful and respected entrepreneurs. Also, upskilling the existing workforce with skills in disruptive industries and jobs of the future is a new dimension.

The bottom line is clear: job creation is the solution. But the relationship between growth, employment and education is a complex one calling for careful deliberation.

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EMPLOYMENT IN THE AGE OF AUTOMATION: PREPARING LABOUR WITH FUTURE-READY SKILLS IS ESSENTIAL

Time of India Editorial | May 3, 2018

Read Online



Employment in the age of automation: Preparing labour with future-ready skills is essential

Atul Raja



Automation and the growth of technologies like artificial intelligence

(AI) are resulting in a better, safer and more efficient world. Investments in automation are pouring in. McKinsey estimates that such plants worldwide spent somewhere between \$30-50 billion on AI in 2016.

Interestingly, one of the key drivers of these spends is the falling cost of capital. The unit cost of capital has dropped to less than 6.4 times the unit cost of labour. This amounts to a 6x drop from the unit cost of labour in the early 1990s. This imbalance is fuelling research in AI and robotics with money. These technologies will rewrite global competition, wealth generation and employment.

Already the warning bells in job markets are ringing. By 2033, says one World Bank Development Report, automation will put 47% of current US jobs at risk. Corresponding figures for other nations are 77% for China, 86% for India and 65% for Argentina.

These estimates are for

direct job loss. The real numbers will be several times larger. For example, autonomous cars will result in direct job losses for drivers of taxis, trucks and buses. But autonomous cars will be programmed to adhere to local laws, and the star of the traffic police force can shrink substantially.

It doesn't take research to tell us that jobs that can be done by machines will see a fall in wages. But, it is interesting to see the industry with which

Nasscom predicted that automation would result in a 20%-25% reduction in IT jobs in three years. Labour intensive industries will become the first targets of automation

machines have an impact on wages. One study in the US found that the addition of one industrial robot per thousand workers results in a wage reduction of 0.1% across the economy. As wages drop, the demand for goods and services falls, leading to further job cuts – relentlessly



pushing the economy towards recession. The only way to stem this trend is to increase employment and/or wages.

What do you still do as an employer for when 65% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented as yet? The other problem, as the World Economic Forum (WEF) has pointed out, is that the number of new jobs created will not be the same as those lost. The forecast is worrisome. According to a 2016 WEF report titled, 'The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution', of the 1.1 million jobs that will be displaced by 2030, only 1.1 million will be created.

In India, we must brace for

the impact of these trends. Amongst the ones severely affected will be the IT industry. Nasscom predicted that automation would result in a 20%-25% reduction in IT jobs in three years. The impact will be serious across sectors from e-commerce to manufacturing, security services, banking and agriculture. Labour intensive industries will become the first targets of automation.

The solution lies in providing the basics of modernising the workforce and delivering skills for the future. A rudimentary first step is to ensure everyone becomes literate in the use of technology followed by ensuring that driver continues and taking learning with digital.

actively encouraging a culture of being versatile and adaptable. In addition, the process of job destruction and new job creation will be gradual and chaotic making it essential to put in place the mechanisms that make job creation successful.

That structure can be altered to prevent the concentration of capital in the hands of corporations that save on employment costs. This too can be channelled into employment creation or social security. It is also worth examining the idea of taxing robots that replace humans. MIT's David Foray has suggested that the tax could be used to fund certain types of employment such as those which take care of the elderly or those working with children.

We may see further acceptance of a Universal Basic Income (UBI). UBI puts money – or what is called 'guaranteed livable income' – into the hands of all citizens, no questions asked. The idea is to create an equitable world. If that happens, surely automation will have played its part in changing society. Meanwhile, a more practical approach is to set up effective strategies for skilling.

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STRATEGIES TO CREATE JOBS IN INDIA: HOW TO REAP THE DIVIDEND GIFTED BY DEMOGRAPHY

Times of India | October 17, 2017

Read Online 

Strategies to create jobs in India: How to reap the dividend gifted by demography

Atul Raja and Kunal Prakash



When the number of cell-phones sold in India touched the billion mark in 2013, India manufactured very few cell-phones. Most of the growing mobile phone market in the country, the government increased the import tariff for mobiles in 2013 making the import of finished mobile devices more expensive than producing it locally - an exercise known as correcting the inverted duty structure. The reform, along with a few structural changes, made India one of the fastest growing mobile manufacturing economies in the world with more than 42 plants set up in the last two years, generating direct and indirect employment for over four lakh people.

By next year, the number of unemployed job-seeking individuals in India will reach 38 million. Promising interventions, like the one that spurred job creation in the mobile manufacturing industry, need to be adopted more widely. According to a FICCI 2016 report, there are opportunities to correct inverted duty structures in six other sectors: capital goods, cement, electronics and electricals, rubber products, minerals

and textiles. Knowing what induces job creation, while keeping the macro reality of India in perspective, is a critical step to work ameliorating the current situation.

Job creation is a consequence of two broad phenomena: creation of new enterprises and expansion of existing ones. Employment friendly policies like promoting investments, regulating inter national trade, making ecosystems conducive for businesses and managing labour markets, eventually lead to one of the above two phenomena. However, the theory has unique exceptions in the Indian context.

More than 66% of non-farm enterprises in the country - a little over 38 million, most of them MSMEs - function without a single hired worker

Enterprise creation in India has not traditionally translated to creation of proportionate new jobs. More than 66% of non-farm enterprises in the country - a little over 38 million, most of them MSMEs - function without a single hired worker. The government's Startup India Policy, aimed at boosting enterprise creation while generating employment, is a step towards solving the problem. But the minuscule coverage of enterprises under the policy (1,000 so far the latest report) remains a potential hurdle.



Also, with 88% of total VC funding going to startups located in just six cities, the regional skew in the number of new jobs created is high, leaving the potential of an otherwise vast nation almost untapped. Nevertheless, with the volitional implementation of the Startup India Action Plans, it is not impractical to expect a rebalanced in the medium term.

The inability of a large number of enterprises to grow and create jobs also indicates that enterprise expansion is non-optimal in India. Research states that the lack of emphasis on innovation, coupled with excessive regulations, are two prime reasons. Poor R&D allocation to GDP (less than 1% of India's annual budget, as compared to 3.4% by countries like the US and China) inhibits innovation, and hence prospect of job growth. A programme like the 'Small Business Innovation and Research' (which provides enterprises with cooperative R&D grants), proposed in

a NITI Aayog Expert Committee report, can be a game-changer.

For larger firms that can afford to innovate and grow, a totally different kind of challenge limits their job creation potential. The unit cost of capital has fallen to less than 6.6 times the unit cost of labour - a 10x drop from the unit cost of labour in the early 1980s. Chasing higher productivity at a lower cost is the prevailing industry norm and recent developments in automation and artificial intelligence pose a disrupting impact on the job market.

ApT policies aimed at tempering the impact of rapid technological buildup and striking a balance between productivity and labour employment need to be conceptualised. New age sectors like defence and aerospace, education and healthcare, and burgeoning green sectors like solar energy and wind, present another massive opportunity to identify 'upcoming jobs' and prepare talent accordingly. India's ambition to create more than one million new jobs in the green energy sector by 2022 is encouraging.

Large-scale job creation is the government's most formidable challenge presently. Prudent strategies based on actual lay of the land will determine India's growth trajectory and pronounce the quality of life our citizens will lead once we grow old as a nation. Not reaping the dividends of demography is not an option. The time to act is now.

The authors work with the Wadhvani Foundation on Policy and Initiatives

GOOD NUMBERS MAKE GOOD POLICIES: RELIABLE JOBS DATA WILL HELP INDIA OVERCOME ITS JOBLESS GROWTH PROBLEM

Times of India | June 13, 2017

Read Online 

Good numbers make good policies: Reliable jobs data will help India overcome its jobless growth problem

Atul Raja and Kestav Prakash



The World Bank has predicted that India's GDP growth will be 7.2% in 2017-18 and 7.7% in 2019-20. This forecasted rate of growth vigorously supports India's aspiration of being recognised as the most promising economy globally. But do these numbers point the complete picture?

The Indian mindset has traditionally been biased towards looking at GDP figures as the most important indicator of development taking place in the country. In the process we may have neglected an equally important indicator: employment generation. And though employment is usually seen as a by-product of GDP growth, the reality in India cannot be more distant.

Estimates from NSSO and CSO data suggest that between 2004 and 2012, India's net new cumulative job growth resulted by only 3% (or 15 million net new jobs) when the country's economy expanded by a whopping 54%.

It cannot be denied that a

nation of 312 million strong labour force cannot afford jobless growth. Employment generation has to be the soul of Indian policy creation, and in order to do that it is imperative to know the statistics on the same periodically.

But the last time India carried out a focussed and comprehensive estimation of the employment situation nationwide was in 2012 through the 68th round of NSSO. Needless to say, these

Growth in GDP figures may or may not create enough jobs, as is evidenced by what happened in 2004-12. But creating enough jobs will lead to sustainable GDP growth without a doubt

figures are no longer very useful for gauging policy exigencies in the country.

Regular estimation of job numbers, and various indicators related to it, has long guided policy creation in some of the other successful economies. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), a 2,500 employee strong arm of the US Department of



Labor, invests approximately \$900 million annually on finding facts in the field of labour economics and statistics. Its monthly employment report is regarded as a significant resource to evaluate government's performance and render critical perspectives on employment generation and economic development.

Other like countries have also managed to make considerable progress in producing regular data on employment in order to determine policy priorities. China brings together three major bodies, namely National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and All-China Federation of Trade Unions for producing its Labour Statistical Yearbook. Brazil's Institute of Geography and Statistics

assesses the labour market monthly. Russia's Federal State Statistics Service too publishes its Labour Force Report quarterly.

India is getting started though. Government has just set up a taskforce under NITI Aayog vice-chairman Arvind Panagariya to produce periodic and reliable data on employment. This is an addition to another recent initiative by the PMO to have all cabinet proposals state the number of jobs they can create. The most redoubtable initiative in this space, however, comes from the statistics ministry which has recently announced plans to conduct periodic labour force surveys in the country to produce quarterly employment data.

With the launch of a plethora of employment related schemes in recent times, periodic labour

force surveys would not only guide general policy creation in the country but also equip the central and state governments to diagnose and address challenges in specific industrial sectors and regions. Further, this exercise would bolster government's capacity to create more meaningful jobs and eventually move towards formalising the economy.

Managing the labour markets effectively is an important strategy to ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth. Regular and comprehensive employment estimation is a crucial element of it. With the announcement of periodic labour force surveys, India has not only created an opportunity for itself to undo its recent below-par performance on the job creation front, it has also opened a lucrative window to make job creation the heart of policy formulation.

Growth in GDP figures may or may not create enough jobs, as is evidenced by what happened between 2004 and 2012. Creating enough jobs, however, will lead to sustainable GDP growth without a doubt. Recent initiatives by the central government on this front elicit optimism.

The writers work with the Wadhvani Foundation

'STAND UP' OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND A UNION BUDGET OF HOPE

New Indian Express | March 6, 2016

Read Online



'Stand Up' of Entrepreneurship and a Union Budget of Hope

CORPORATE VOICE



by Atul Raja

The formal launch of 'Startup India, Standup India' on January 16 was path-breaking. For once,

here was an establishment promise that held sway beyond expectations. A 'leap-forward policy' and recognition of startups as engines of wealth and job-creation will now provide momentum towards strengthening the backbone of the startup ecosystem – a well-trained & accessible mentor network, mushrooming of accelerators and incubators and a healthy growth in investments by VC firms and angel investors. This effort of the government in bringing entrepreneurship to the forefront raised expectations from the Budget 2016-17, which did have a series of announcements aimed at allaying challenges that startups face and ensuring MSMEs in the country get a boost. Here are the top reforms, essentially a first step take-away from the 'Startup India' policy aimed at transforming the way Indian startups do business today.

Tax Reforms: A three-year tax holiday on profits for startups.

The Budget also proposes to insert a new Section 54EE to provide exemption from capital gains tax, subject to conditions. However, it is common knowledge that startups normally take minimum five years to break even. Hence, an extension of the holiday tenure will lead to

A leap-forward policy and recognition of startups as engines of wealth and job-creation will now provide momentum towards strengthening the backbone of the startup ecosystem

more benefits intended.

Allocation of ₹500 crore for SC/ST and women entrepreneurs: Aimed to stimulate startup activity in these categories, this is likely to benefit 2.5 lakh entrepreneurs. Women are at the tipping point of entrepreneurship in India and make up slightly over a third of the workforce. Their increased contribution to GDP and the ability to create employment could be a game changer for the economy.

Promotion of Innovation: A special patent regime has been proposed with a 10% rate of tax on income from worldwide exploitation of patents developed and registered in India. This is perhaps for the first time that Intellectual Property is being addressed as an asset for the startup ecosystem.

Fund of Funds: Plans to raise ₹2,500 crore annually for four years to finance the startups. This corpus will definitely enhance the special propensity of an entrepreneur for risk-taking.

Ease of doing business: The ability to register in a day will be a boon for aspiring entrepreneurs allowing them to focus on building disruptive products and services. This will help India climb rapidly in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business' Index and resultant flow of investment.

MOCs: Entrepreneurship learning through Massive Open Online Courses will provide access to educational

resources across the country. With technology democratising entrepreneurship and the brightest from IITs and IIMs pursuing it, India is witnessing a vibrant entrepreneurial revolution.

(The writer is Executive Vice-President, Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation)



Making the disabled economically-abled

Sustained policy interventions can ensure a level-playing field



ATUL RAJA

ACCORDING to the World Health Organisation (WHO), around 15% of the global population, or almost 1 billion people, live with disabilities, and 80% of this PwD (Persons with Disabilities) population resides in developing nations. It is also estimated that 6% of India's population (roughly 72 million) suffers from some form of disability or the other, and notably only around 3.4 million of these are educated.

Without doubt, the disabled represent the world's largest minority. However, there is a key geographical difference here – 80% of children with disabilities in developing countries like India do not attend schools and are grossly under-represented in higher education, whereas in the developed nations of Europe and the US, the disabled are not under-represented in education. For example, in the UK, PwDs undergoing higher education are eligible to receive a provision Disabled Students' Allowance, irrespective of their financial status. In undergraduate courses too, PwDs are provided a number of other monetary benefits such as Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Income-Related Budgeting and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Tax Credits and Universal Credit. Similarly, in the US, most top universities provide need-based financial aid and generous fee waivers to PwD students. Such empowerment of students with disabilities to ensure a level-playing field is missing in India.

So, the question arises: "Why are PwDs in India grossly under-represented in even elementary education, let alone higher education and employment?" The answer lies in our socio-cultural fabric. Disabled equal oppor-

tunity for PwDs emanates from the so-called stigma that exists – so much so that in many cases the disability is hidden and unreported. Some root causes include non-availability of educational material, user-friendly infrastructure in transport, colleges and workplaces, absence of relevant education policy and schemes, and widespread apathy in the society and the state at large.

This was demonstrated by the Supreme Court's recent frustration over several states not showing any progress in the implementation of various provisions of the Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.

The fact that traditional and orthodox interventions in India like welfare, reservations, concessions and subsidies have failed (as evidenced from the low levels of employment of PwDs), this gives a strong message to the government to rethink and reengineer policies. The average employment rate of PwDs is only 9.20% in the private sector and 0.54% in the public sector. A recent WHO report shows that 87% of PwDs in India work in the informal sector. Hence, the government, which is the biggest potential employer of PwDs, needs to encourage proactive intervention through rehabilitation, focus on training and entrepreneurial ventures, social protection and grievance management mechanisms.

Certain sectors are especially suited for the disabled and can absorb people with specific disabilities. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has identified 11 high growth sectors ideal for PwDs – which are auto, IT, building and construction, chemicals and pharma, education, electronic hardware, food processing, furniture, gem and jewellery, IT and BPO, etc. It is noteworthy that these are also the leading growth sectors with a major contribution to national GDP. The focus of the government should be on absorbing PwDs in these sectors where skills are in-demand.

There have been recent policy developments that are most

encouraging.

According to a new IT scheme, the decision to waive off fees for PwDs could provide a model for increasing their enrollment in other educational institutions too. This is a path-breaking move that has the potential for a chain reaction. More importantly, it serves as a much-needed signal of positive intent.

The new ministry of social justice and empowerment (MSJE) and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) under the MSJE have begun to put in place progressive schemes and policies that ensure better opportunities and protection of rights for the economic re-

“ Estimates vary, but bringing the differently-abled into the mainstream employment market could result in upwards of a 0.85% increase in GDP. Not just this, decades of western experience in managing the differently-abled suggests that rehabilitation and custodial-care systems can be unnecessarily expensive and counterproductive due to the high cost of institutions **”**

habilitation of PwDs. It is a step towards meeting its objective of training and employment of 3 lakh PwDs in the next three years, with the overall target of 25 lakh by 2023.

The Seventh Pay Commission is likely to recommend work from home for the disabled employees – a huge win to boost PwD confidence and overcome poor infrastructure and accessibility issues.

The government's 'Accessible India' campaign with a plan to raise and

reward public and private companies for disabled-friendly initiatives will result in more inclusive hiring policies (generally showing signs that the-abled) and sensitivity towards the need for 'accessible' physical infrastructure. Again, this could have far-reaching implications if integrated into the government's mega 'Smart Cities' plan.

The ongoing review of the National Building Code of India (NBC), by the Bureau of Indian Standards, has a goal proposal. With large-scale construction taking place across India, stipulations that the NBC is making buildings accessible, and there is also popular demand to include disability access in the material of the NBC and not as a separate annexure (as in the case right now).

The recent Kerala Administrative Tribunal's (KAT) order to include a PwD candidate (who succeeded in the prelims and final written tests) in the rank list of Deputy Collector in the Land Revenue Department is likely to put an end to the PSC practice of conducting 'suitability assessment' of PwD candidates.

Estimates vary but bringing PwDs into the mainstream employment market could result in upwards of a 0.85% increase in GDP. Not just this, decades of western experience in managing PwDs suggests that rehabilitation and custodial care systems can be unnecessarily expensive and counterproductive due to the high cost of institutions. Instead, the focus should be on training, inclusion and accessibility of work and work environments that can lead to significant economic returns.

To view the disabled as an economic resource, it's very important to view them as permanent members of the economy. The PwD sentiment is aptly captured in a 2001 publication of the Australian Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission. It said, on behalf of the disabled, "Don't judge what I can do by what you think I can't."

The author is executive vice-president, Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation.

Philanthropy: Vital for growth

By Atul Raja

There is no denying the global phenomena of growing income disparity and this is true for India as well. A 2014 study by Oxfam showed that the world's top 80 billionaires had a cumulative wealth of over \$1.9 trillion, which is more than the poorest 3.5 billion people on the planet. What's more, the richest 20 per cent in the world own more than 90 per cent of global wealth.

With the rich become richer and the poor poorer by the day, corporate philanthropy in India has the opportunity to play a leading role in helping to tackle some of its burning issues and challenges. This, especially in areas of education and skills development, job creation, community development and health which affect majority of the Indian masses and have been traditionally ignored by public institutions.

With India slated to be among the top five economies of the world, its corporates today are well equipped in terms of resources to create large-scale impact in critical sectors of the economy and play a vital role in economic growth. Annually, leading philanthropists

2 and 5 per cent of their net-worth in philanthropy, while in India as per the list of Biggest Givers in 2014, the average giving range across some of the biggest philanthropists is between 0.4 to 1.7 per cent.

Also, just two out of the top 10 richest Indians find a spot in the 'Top 10 Philanthropists' list. Hence, philanthropy in India has the room to upgrade and upscale. India's wealthy can definitely afford to be more charitable. Bill Gates during his round table with leading Indian philanthropists in 2011 clearly hit the nail on its head when he opined that "a key factor holding [Indian] people back from being even more generous is finding philanthropic endeavours that make them feel like they are having a significant and unique impact".

The way forward is to have professional guidance, teams and structure for optimal use of the philanthropic grants. "High impact and sustained philanthropy can change the face of India" says leading philanthropist, Dr. Ramesh Wadhvani.

Indian philanthropy has to catch up to Western standards and overcome impediments for grant-giving organisations like debilitating societal in-

equalities and weakness of the charitable sector.

There are thousands of NGOs in India. Dearth of regulation and proper accounting procedures are real-time hurdles. The need of the hour for Indian philanthropy is to have a long-term sustainable approach to development, back innovative ideas and programmes for large scale-impact, and promote policy analysis and advocacy.

Encouraging precedents

But there are encouraging precedents in India by those who want to make a difference in their own areas of belief. Subramanian Ramadurai, post his tenure at Tata Consultancy Services, raised over Rs 85 crore to build a paediatric hospital in Mumbai, one of the country's largest. Rajashree Birla of the Aditya Birla Group, has over the years, raised in excess of Rs 93 crore for polio eradication alone.

Nimesh Sumati and Rajesh Kacholia, both Mumbai businessmen, have catalysed Caring Friends - an eclectic, informal and expanding giving group of people who fraternise and raise over Rs 25 crore each year into high-impact NGOs. Anand Mahindra is a co-

founder of Nandini-Dunone, a partnership with the French multinational that pioneered the social business model in Bangladesh as propounded by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus.

However, there are first signs of the changing face of philanthropy led by a strong economy, increased wealth and growing global stature. As per 'Bain's India Philanthropy Report 2015', the country has added more than 100 million donors since 2009 giving philanthropy a much higher public profile and that philanthropic donations are ahead of donations in other developing countries.

The report adds that India is now ranked 69 on the World Giving Index, up from its earlier rank of 134 in 2010. So, in a short period, India has moved from the bottom to the middle of the pack.

No doubt, there is enormous potential for donors and non-profits to effect change in India. But this will need to gather pace otherwise India will continue to have a stratified philanthropy space with a short-term approach as opposed to interventions that are required to build capacity at scale.

(The writer is Executive Vice President - Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation)

A 'SKILFUL' STRATEGY CHARTING THE JOURNEY FROM 'TRAINABLE' TO 'EMPLOYABLE'

TOI – Ascent | September 30, 2015

A 'SKILFUL' STRATEGY

CHARTING THE JOURNEY FROM 'TRAINABLE' TO 'EMPLOYABLE'

Atul Raja

Recent signs of a strategic policy shift from education to employability could go a long way in establishing India as a global HR engine. By 2020, India is estimated to have 850 million people in the working age group, accounting for 28 per cent of the global workforce. If this 850 million is made employable, India has the potential of becoming a leading source for skills. However, skilling 850 million people is by no means a simple task. It will require application of a carefully thought out strategy for desired results.

There are two approaches that seem essential: the first is to closely align capacity building to emerging industry needs; the second is to ensure that the solutions are scalable and the investments required to scale are not linear. Translated, this means creating skilling programmes in sectors where the demand is going to be the highest and therefore Public-Private Participation (PPP) to develop appropriate standards, curriculum, faculty and certification processes. When these programmes are deployed in close proximity to the industry, the outcomes will be better. In addition, these programmes must use inexpensive and scalable technology such as cloud-based learning programmes that can be customised at minimal cost; inexpensive open source software to create engaging and immersive modules for self-paced learning; and mobile networks for anytime-anywhere distribution.

The recent 10th Annual Talent Shortage Survey from Manpower Group showed that filling skilled jobs was one of the biggest challenges before global businesses. This problem is not unique to India. However, of those surveyed, 68 per cent from India said that filling jobs was difficult. This is against the global average of 36 per cent. Clearly, India has a bigger problem than many other parts of the



world. Hence, the urgency to develop and deploy professional skill development programmes and processes cannot be over-emphasised. This is especially true for skill development in rural India where we need to build capacity to ensure higher employability. To address the needs of an expanding labour market from various perspectives, the last budget most encouragingly allocated Rs 1,500 crore for skilling rural youth under the Dam Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana which is expected to create increased demand for skilled labour and better credit management. However, to achieve impact at scale, the convergence of management, monitoring and quality assurance frameworks with other skill development initiatives is a must. A case in point is the National Skill Certification and Monetary Reward Scheme branded as STAR (Standard Training Assessment and Reward) with Rs 1,350 crore allocated for motivating the youth to join skill development programmes through monetary rewards.

The fast emerging concept of 'blended model of learning' should work especially well for rural skilling needs. Combining online and classroom instruction, this model integrates the socialising opportunities of a classroom with the flexibility of online learning, freeing up the student's time for family obligations, part time jobs and other pursuits. International studies have indicated that a blended model leads to lowered dropout rates. However, for blended models, there is a clear need to establish a robust infrastructure – technology curriculum, content, faculty, collaboration with academia, physical facilities and industry linkages. While most of the developed economies are equipping, India has the distinction of being one of the youngest nations with 54 per cent of its population below 25 years. Let's join hands to ensure that India reaps the power of its numbers.

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IT IS HIGH TIME TO REBOOT AND REVITALISE OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

Times of India | August 11, 2015

Read Online 

It is high time to reboot and revitalise our education system

There is one thing we recognise by heart: The world has changed from what it was 20 years ago but education in India isn't changed all that much.

While curriculum has largely remained static, its application has become increasingly dynamic.

Today, we have industries reliant on mobile technologies, organisations using virtual reality environments, renewable energy and drone technology. However, educational content, assessment and certification processes have lagged behind the relentless advances in technology.

Today, we stare at the heart ready—we have not forgotten in education for employability. Where do we find professional skills and vocational programs linked to a university degree? The answer is not difficult to seek.

There is a marked disconnect between what academia is producing and what industry and society need. With expectations of students to high growth, optimistic investment climate and expansion across key sectors like manufacturing, the demand for high levels of technical and soft skills will only increase further. As a result, a large section of Indian population needs to be skilled, re-skilled and up-skilled.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has noted that out

gurukool

Atul Raja, EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT OF WADHWANI FOUNDATIONS



of 11.1 million young people—18.6% percent of work in 2013. Hence, the skills supply chain failed to cater to the demand.

The problem is endemic across the globe but India sits among the top nations facing the problem. The 2014 global Talent Shortage Survey by Manpower Group showed that talent scarcity prevented 61% of employers in India from hiring people with the needed skills.

In another five years, the problem will spin out of control if we don't act now.

Parcaste suggest that by 2020, about 66% of India's population of 1.2 billion will be in the working age group of 15-64 years. A majority of them will be unemploye.

This fracture in the skills supply chain could disrupt India's plans of manufacturing dominance (Make in India), its goals to digitally empower citizens (Digital India), and its reduced dependence on fossil fuel and its carbon footprint by embracing renewables (National Solar Mission).

The major gaps in skills are in construction, health care, and retail. Besides this, there is a skills shortage for jobs ranging from welders to nurses and from electricians to nurses. Today, industries require market-driven skills to meet their business needs of higher productivity, lower costs and higher efficiencies.

Hence, it is imperative that educational institutes beef up their in-house training facilities, industries tie-up and part with training institutes.

They need to overhaul the curriculum, content and teaching and training methodologies. What are the systems, infrastructure, processes and investments we need to overcome the skills challenges of India? These are questions that policy makers, planners and industry must quickly answer.

CAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP MEET THE JOB-CREATION CHALLENGE?

Financial Express | August 21, 2015

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WORLD ENTREPRENEURS' DAY

Can entrepreneurship meet the job-creation challenge?



According to the ministry of corporate affairs, about 1 lakh new companies were registered in India in 2014. So, entrepreneurship is growing. But the outcome of this positive trend will be tested by the number and quality of jobs created



ATUL RAJA

Culturally, Indians have been moulded to conform to norms and being risk-averse. Entrepreneurship of the modern times—which requires large measures of independent thinking and decision-making combined with the ability to innovate and hit the curved ball—has therefore never been a part of our DNA. But this is changing rapidly. The country's top educational institutions such as the IITs, IIMs and BITS Pilani (as also many others) are spawning a breed of top-notch entrepreneurs, who look upon failure as a badge of success—Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal of Flipkart and Ankit Bhatnagar of Ola are from IITs; Anviya Patil of ZipDial and Niranjan KM who has set up a manufacturing unit for low-cost sanitary pads for rural India are from IIMs; Pooja Indra Sarna, co-founder, redBus, is from BITS Pilani.

This is a growing list which confirms the trend that entrepreneurship is fast becoming the first choice of many graduates in premier institutions with startups in wide-ranging fields such as decision sciences, food catering, book rentals, better cricket bats, wedding management, mobile payments, global delivery of goods from business temples and resulting pre-owned branded garments online.

As recently as 2013, when Eric Schmidt, Google's executive chair-

man, was in India, he observed that, "As many as 40% of the startups in Silicon Valley are headed by India-based entrepreneurs. Without prejudice, the IITs might be a great hub for startup talent." If anything, Schmidt was prescient. Now, the trend which started some years ago is in full spate. Many of these institutes have extensive support systems and accelerators for entrepreneurs. IIT Bombay, for example, has a highly successful Entrepreneurship Cell while IIM Bangalore has the NS Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (NSHCEL).

There is good reason why young Indians are able to step out and create success faster, better and with greater confidence than ever before. This is because we have learnt to combine self-belief with intelligent risk taking. It is necessary to examine this facet of free enterprise—entrepreneurship is not so much about risk taking as it is about intelligent and data-based risk management. It may appear counter-intuitive, but when risk is managed intelligently, the ability of the entrepreneur to cross-pollinate ideas, innovate and foster creativity is improved several

Are 1 lakh new businesses that create employment for an estimated 10 lakh people enough for India? When you consider that India is adding 10 lakh people to the workforce each month—or crores looking for jobs in the next 10 years—the urgency to address the problem starts assuming importance

fold. This, in turn, creates a powerful magnet for venture capital and top talent—both of which are critical drivers for success.

Indian entrepreneurs are also picking up lessons from their Silicon Valley peers. The mantras, "Fail fast, succeed soon" and "done is better than perfect" are becoming more acceptable. Silicon Valley-based chairman and CEO of Symphony Technology Group, and founder and chairman of Wadhwani Foundation, Ramesh Wadhvani, says that, "Entrepreneurship is sensible risk-taking and about risk management." Indian entrepreneurs have come to accept that success is built on the back of several failures and that there is deeper wisdom in iterative, independent and bold decision-making. They are now embracing what Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg once observed: "The biggest risk is not taking any risk."

Youngsters in the country who were once wedded to the ideals of financial safety and family commitments are discovering a new freedom—bold ideas are liberating them and the desire to deliver performance first is changing mindsets.

Not surprisingly, there is ample evidence that these deep set changes are taking firm root. A clear reflection of this is in the number of new companies being set up in the country. According to the ministry of corporate affairs, close to 1 lakh (98,472) new companies were registered in India in 2014, pointing to the fact that entrepreneurship is fast growing. However, the eventual outcome of this positive trend will be tested by the number and quality of jobs created.

The question is: "Are 1 lakh new businesses that create employment for an estimated 10 lakh people enough for India?" When you consider that India is adding 10 lakh people to the workforce each month—or 25 crore people looking for jobs in the next 10 years—the urgency to address the problem is immense. If there is one obvious conclusion from these simple facts, it is this: There is a need to bring monetary capital to entrepreneurship activity. But before that can happen, the budding ecosystem of skills development, entrepreneurship-led education and mentorship must scale.

One example we have is that of Vijay Shekhar Sharma, founder of One97 Communications. Sharma began more than 15 years ago when the cultural aversion to entrepreneurship still existed. He began by borrowing small amounts from family members and friends. As his company grew success, he began investing in startups, offering entrepreneurs a chance to learn from his own experience. Today Sharma is a poster boy as the founder of Paytm, a sister company to One97 Communications, dealing in mobile payments, in which Jack Ma's Alibaba has agreed to invest \$75 million.

The ideas, policies, infrastructure, skills, mentorship and education to ignite entrepreneurship are slowly falling in place. But the on-ground reality is that we need to further accelerate the growth of entrepreneurship in order to address the looming challenge of job creation.

The author is executive vice president, Wadhwani Foundation

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Fulfilling the promise of a skilled India

Although decent progress has been made in skill enhancement across the board, we must not forget that the numbers we need to address are in millions—the vision of the National Skill Development Initiative is to skill 500 million by 2022



ATUL RAJA

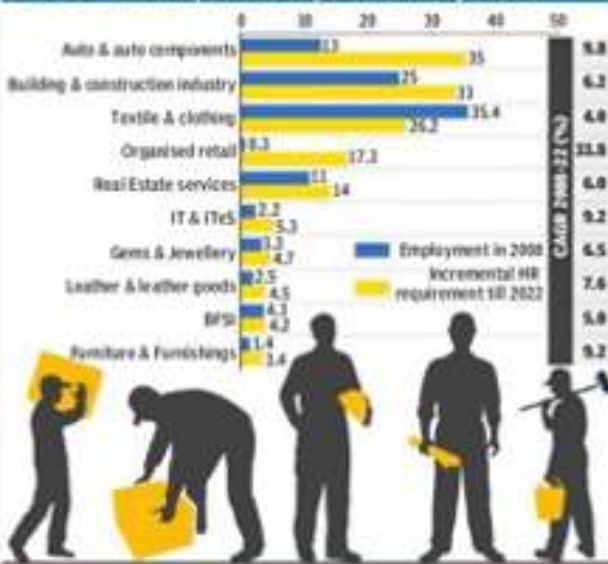
Skilling, of late, has become a hot button topic across the world. And given India's demographic dividend, it acquires special significance. With 54% of our population below 25 years of age, we are sitting on a massive workforce. Unfortunately, many of them are unemployable with their skills not matching the emerging industry requirements. Traditional education has failed to equip them for the world of tomorrow. The numbers associated with this problem are daunting—by 2020, almost 60% of India's population of over 1.3 billion will be in the working age group of 15-59 years. Of these, barely 2% to 3% are expected to have usable skills. That eventuality is only five years away!

There are two ways to look at this—as a massive wave of unemployment that will leave India floundering or as an unprecedented resource for wealth creation that will outpace much of the world, if equipped with the right skills.

India is responding to the challenge. The country has recognised the fact that skilling is an urgent need. Further, it has begun to put in place the infrastructure, processes, standards and systems required to raise large skilling factories where youth can be trained for a number of trades and professions that help them contribute to GDP.

The government is now giving momentum to the response by putting in place policies and support systems to turn skilling into a base industry that drives others such as auto & auto components, construction, textiles, health & wellness, gems & jewellery, logistics, security, telecom and textiles (see graph). In all, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) that the Cabinet approved in March 2015,

Growth in manpower requirement by 2022



Traditional education has failed to equip a large number of Indians for the world of tomorrow. The numbers associated with this problem are daunting—by 2020, almost 60% of our population of over 1.3 billion will be in the working age group of 15-59 years. Of these, barely 2-3% are expected to have usable skills. That eventuality is only five years away!

has identified 34 emerging sectors for immediate attention. This scheme is being coordinated by the recently shaped ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship (MSDE).

The PMKVY aims to train 34 lakh people, including 10 lakh who will be certified in recognition of prior learning. Institutional arrangements comprising of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), private assessing agencies and training partners for each identified industry are already in place. The PMKVY is demand-driven—or in other words, it closely addresses

the skills gap. It is backed by a budget of ₹1,500 crore (for skilling 34 lakh youth).

The PMKVY has commendable intent. In addition to its goal of creating employable youth, its strategy is aligned with several other national programmes such as Swachh Bharat, Make-in-India, Digital India and National Solar Mission.

Aside from skills required for recognised industries such as banking, tourism, construction, real estate, textiles, etc, the overall effort to skill India also takes into consideration the need for skill development in trades and occupations such as carpentry, masonry,

mining, etc, as there is a dire shortage of these skills.

There is also a national push towards promoting craftsmanship. The Directorate General of Training, holds an annual competition in association with the CII for craftsmen such as electrician, fitter, industrial electronics, miller, tool & die maker, Turner & welder, cutter & tailor.

In other words, the approach is well-balanced and addresses the overall needs of industry and society. To accelerate this process, the government has set up the National Skill Certification and Monetary Reward Scheme. The idea behind the scheme is to ensure that those with usable skills are certified. It provides an incentive of approximately ₹10,000 to each candidate in the manufacturing, services and other sectors who undergo training and certification at an authorised centre (the incentive value varies based on levels). In fact, an amount of ₹1,000-crore has been set aside for this by the government—aiming to ensure that 10 lakh individuals go through a certification process with standardisation as the objective.

What remains to be seen is if the skills being imparted are of standards that can also meet global requirements in developed countries such as Germany, Japan and the US.

Although tremendous progress is being made in skill enhancement across the board, the numbers being addressed are in few hundred thousands. The real numbers that need to be addressed are in millions—to be specific, the vision of the National Skill Development Initiative is to skill 500 million by 2022. If those numbers are to be met, there is an urgent need to scale infrastructure and support. The private sector has shown considerable initiative to give India's skilling initiative a boost. Philanthropists and not-for-profit organisations have also joined hands with the government to give skilling the required impetus.

Much work needs to be done. But, more importantly, a strong and determined start has been made.

The author is executive vice president, Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation.

Demographic dividend or disaster

29 MAR, 2016

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Atul Raja

It was heartening to see that the Union Budget 2016-17 had 'education, skill development and job creation' as one of the nine pillars envisaged to transform Indian economy. Skill development as a dire need for high-quality job fulfillment is a hot button topic across the globe today, and with its low labor-cost, rich talent pool, and a young, ever burgeoning workforce, India sits at the cusp of a great opportunity to become the 'human resource capital of the world'. India's potential to power its global competitiveness as a knowledge-based society is well-known. Therefore, higher education & training as a feeder to workforce, and an unwavering focus on skill development are strategic necessities for the country today.

Each year, 12 million Indians join the workforce in India but majority of them are unskilled. It is estimated that more than 84% of the workforce has no technical education and merely 8% in rural and 30% in urban areas have general education of higher secondary and above. Hence, the urgent task at hand is to enhance the current skilling and technical education capacity in the country from ~4 million to ~15 million [including training requirements of the existing workforce]. Emphatic planning to fuel technical education and skill-sets will play a crucial role in the success of far-reaching initiatives like Skill India, Make in India, Digital India and Jan-Dhan Yojana.

The recent Union Budget 2016-17 has acknowledged the significance of higher education and skill development, and the allocations in this regard are noteworthy:

Allotment of Rs. 28,840 crores to improve higher education under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) as against Rs. 26,855 crores in 2015-16, an increase of 7.4%. By 2030, India will be amongst the youngest nations in the world and with nearly 140 million people in the college-going age group, one in every four graduates in the world will be a product of the Indian higher education system. To enhance vertical and horizontal mobility of students today will create intellectual, economic and social value for tomorrow, and foster a culture of innovation.

Setting up of the not-for-profit, Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) with an initial capital base of Rs. 1,000 crores; this avatar of a non-banking financial company is slated to provide interest-free loans to higher educational institutions for constructing new campuses, expanding or renovating existing infrastructure in top institutes like IITs and IIMs, and creating state-of-the-art laboratories. Over the next five years, the capital base of HEFA is projected to grow to Rs. 20,000+ crores through leveraging of the markets and CSR contributions. HEFA is a novel idea that recognizes the role of private sector in the education sector, but its operative and regulatory mechanisms will be crucial to smooth implementation. We will have to wait for a framework currently being developed by MHRD. The proposal of making all central and state higher educational institutions eligible as members of HEFA [with riders] could be far-reaching. However, there is no doubt that HEFA will benefit both the students as well as the financing system.

Allotment of Rs. 1,700 crores for establishing 1500 multi-skill training institutes (MSTIs) to train youngsters for jobs and also to startup. This is a radical change from traditional ITIs. MSTIs are envisaged as the new generation ITIs focused on reach and penetration of skill development efforts at block and district levels and public-private partnerships (PPP) for better quality and ease of delivery. However, a constant realignment of skill expectations with high-demand jobs will be essential.

A slew of measures, in addition to the multi-skill training institutes (MSTIs), have resulted in the Government's ambitious target of skilling one crore youth over the next three years under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), the National Skill Development Mission has created an elaborate skilling eco-system and imparted training to 76 lakh youth; entrepreneurship is being encouraged and democratized with plans to provide entrepreneurship education and training in 2200 colleges, 300 schools, 500 Government ITIs and 50 Vocational Training Centers through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly from remote parts, will be connected to mentors and credit markets; tax benefits will be given to training institutes till 2020; setting up of a National Board for Skill Development Certification in partnership with the industry and academia; model skill centers planned across 500+ districts in the country. PMKVY is the engine that will steer the skilling ecosystem in the country and the Government's positive intent is clear with substantial funds allocation. A strong industry linkage to ensure high-quality employment opportunities can be a game changer here.

Government's focus on higher education and skill development along with the PPP nature of multi-skill institutes and Higher Education Financing Agency is likely to spur interest in Corporate India to fulfill their CSR obligations though focused spending in these two areas. There are precedents like partnering with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in delivery. Also this is nothing new. In 2014-15 too, education and skill development were key areas that attracted large CSR spending. A total of Rs. 6,338 crores were spent on CSR by 460 companies in FY15, and education and skill development attracted 23% of the CSR spending, according to data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA). Therefore, in FY 17, there is every likelihood of the CSR spends increasing in this space.

With 54% of our population below 25 years of age, we are sitting on a substantial but mainly unemployable workforce. By 2020, almost 80% of India's population of 1.3 billion will be in the working age group of 15-69 years. Of these, barely 2 to 3% are expected to have usable skills. So we are looking at two scenarios here; a massive wave of unemployment that could sweep India or generation of an unprecedented human capital resource which will outpace much of the world, catapulting India into a skills factory supplying talent to all corners of the globe.

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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA: COOKING UP CHANGE

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Atul Raja Executive Vice-President, Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation

Women Entrepreneurs In India: Cooking Up Change

Updated 1 hour ago



In August 2015, entrepreneur Saïree Chahal, founder of Sheroes, raised $\text{Rs } 3$ crore funding. Sheroes has been connecting talented women professionals to career opportunities and women entrepreneurs to the startup ecosystem. The investors include Google's Rajan Anandani, Flipkart's Kavya Basal, Paytm's Vijay Shekhar Sharma, the Raghav Bahl-owned Quantibit Media and Zoo Startups. Anandani swiftly pointed out the prime reason for the investment. He said that Sheroes had the potential to impact 100 million women in the next ten years. Chahal, who has been building her business for over a decade, is now part of a select but successful brigade who are slowly but surely ushering the growth story of woman entrepreneurship in India.

According to a 2015 report released by IVP Eurasia covering the US, Europe, Middle East and Asia, India ranks as the most active country for women entrepreneurs. The report finds that an astonishing 48% of entrepreneurs in the country are women, and places India ahead of Hong Kong and France, the other two nations that follow India in terms of active women entrepreneurs.

"[T]he annual growth of the economy could get a boost of 2.4% if India implements pro-growth and pro-gender policies"

expected to grow by 30% and in the UK by 24% over the same time period.

What is driving more and more women to start businesses as diverse as pet care clinics, loan recovery firms, presentation-sharing platforms, wheelchair manufacturing, telemarketing companies, herbal care products, publishing, public relations organisations and learning management systems? The short answer is women entrepreneurs are acquiring the confidence, education and skills required for entrepreneurship along with networking capabilities, funding and mentoring.

Two socio-cultural changes are equally responsible for driving the rise of Indian women in entrepreneurship. One, traditional family structures are changing from joint families to nuclear families, allowing women greater independence; and two, the business environment is becoming more gender neutral, allowing women to find their feet and unlock their potential. The stereotypical image of women as home makers, kitchen fixtures, doing in others and economically non-productive members of society is fast changing. Women are now successfully negotiating family and work, finding support to explore their creativity, taking risks and nurturing sustainable enterprises.

These findings are supported by the Dell Women's Global Entrepreneurship Study which found India to be one of the most favourable places for women entrepreneurship to set up shop. The study suggested that businesses owned by women entrepreneurs will thrive and expected to grow by up to 90% in the next five years. By comparison, similar businesses in the US were expected to grow by 30% and in the UK by 24% over the same time period.

In fact, women entrepreneurs could make a large impact on GDP. A report by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that the annual growth of the economy could get a boost of 2.4% if India implements pro-growth and pro-gender policies. These policies could include gender quotas at the national and state parliamentary levels, addressing wage parity between genders, balancing labour laws so that women have equal opportunities, expansion of the Aardhaar program to give opportunities through banking and credit support, enhanced maternity benefits and an extensive mentor cum training framework.

Not surprisingly, women entrepreneurship in the country has become the subject of research in recent times. Examining developments in the area could help address several critical issues ranging from skill shortages in industry to improving the innovation and creativity quotient of the nation, and from producing products and services aimed at wider markets and mix of populations to favourably improving the status and standing of women in society.

One of the more subtle reasons of women taking to entrepreneurship has been the fact that initiatives can be launched with a small amount of capital. A study by Women's Web a few years ago titled "Women & Entrepreneurship in India" found that 60% of budding entrepreneurs started their business with a capital of less than $\text{Rs } 1$ lakh. They used their personal savings, took loans from friends and family to bootstrap their ideas.

Even with minimal funding, women entrepreneurs tend to find success. While there is no scientific study to identify the elements that make women entrepreneurs succeed even on lean resources, a *Deloitte* study called "Women at the Wheel: Do Female Executives Drive Startup Success?" has shown that the overall median proportion of female executives in successful companies is 7.1%, compared to 3.1% at unsuccessful companies. This means that when women launch an idea, it stands a higher chance of success - reason enough for capital to find its way more easily to women-led startups.

The fact that women are at the tipping point of entrepreneurship in India and have higher success rates doesn't mean that they don't have any challenges and barriers to face. While there is increased social acceptance of women in the workplace, they still face difficulties in finding team members, mentors and funding to scale up their ideas. These and additional barriers like practical experience and training in the use of technology, if addressed, will collectively form a recipe to accelerate the success of women entrepreneurs.

"[W]hen women launch an idea, it stands a higher chance of success - reason enough for capital to find its way more easily to women-led startups."

Usha Ramani Venuru, the founder of Gurajada IT Solutions Private Limited, a company that provides eLearning and learning management systems says, "After three years of designing my product, I was not able to find a niche as compared to other products on the market". Venuru was introduced to the Dream to Destination mentor program of National Entrepreneurship Network (NEN). "My mentor showed me ways to get revenue for my product and that's the direction I had been wanting since the beginning. Now that the niche is identified, we are trying to build additional products around it," says Venuru.

Venuru is not alone. Women entrepreneurs are a precious resource and every opportunity to realise their true potential needs to be leveraged so that India's vast talent pool of women is not frittered away, especially at a time when businesses are facing a severe talent crunch. According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2014, India's women make up slightly over a third of the workforce and hence their increased contribution to GDP and the ability to create employment could be a game changer for India's economy.

HOW WOMEN POWER CAN ADD 2.4% TO INDIA'S GDP

YourStory | November 19, 2015

Read Online 



How women power can add 2.4% to India's GDP

SURESH ANAND
13 NOVEMBER 2015



Barring a few exceptions, women entrepreneurs in India are yet to be bracketed as role models and celebrities. But don't be surprised if this changes fast. India is sitting at the cusp of a women entrepreneurship revolution. There is a growing list of trailblazers.

Rashmi Sinha, the founder of *SlideShare* which was acquired by LinkedIn in 2012, was named amongst the world's Top 10 Women Influencers in Web 2.0 by Fast Company. Ashwini Ashokan, the founder of Mad Street Den that solves problems using artificial intelligence, *Neeru Sharma*, founder of online retailer Infibeam that has revenues running into millions, Anu Sridharan the founder of NextDrop that lets urban residents track availability of piped water, *Shantala Walsh* whose Shanti Life provides microfinance to slum dwellers to start businesses and Sairee Chahal, founder of Sheroks that connects talented women professionals to career opportunities. The list is ever growing and strengthening the perception that in times to come women entrepreneurs will hold tremendous influence on India's economy.



The trend of women taking to entrepreneurship has grown silently. But historically speaking, this is a most natural trend in India where women were well known to roll out 'papads' and pickles – and as far back as 1959 the iconic *Lijat Papad*, an Indian women's cooperative, was born. Today it employs 42,000 people and has a turnover of over Rs. 800 crore! With a legacy like that can Indian women not be at the forefront of entrepreneurship?

According to a 2015 report released by BNP Paribas covering US, Europe, Middle East and Asia, India ranks as the most active country for successful women entrepreneurs. The report finds that an astonishing 49% of entrepreneurs in the country are women and places India ahead of Hong Kong and France, the other two nations that follow India in terms of active women entrepreneurs.

The trend is giving rise to multiple support systems and accelerators aimed at promoting and sustaining women entrepreneurs. In March 2014, NASSCOM launched Girls in Technology (GIT), a programme to ensure that women find it easier to set up internet based technology companies. Recently FICCI launched 'Swayam' in Ahmedabad with the aim of supporting women entrepreneurs. HSBC India chairman, *Naina Lal Kidwai*, befittingly chaired this event. These are just two examples of a healthy and vibrant ecosystem that is fast falling in place to incubate and support women entrepreneurs in India.

Education and vocational training are the primary drivers for turning the entrepreneurial aspirations of women into reality. But there are other socio-economic reasons for driving the transition of more and more women starting businesses as diverse as pet care clinics, loan recovery firms, presentation-sharing platforms, wheelchair manufacturing, telemarketing companies, herbal care products, publishing, public relations organizations and learning management systems. Traditional family structures are changing that are allowing women an independent voice; the gender gap between men and women has narrowed, enabling women to find their feet and unlock their potential; they are acquiring the confidence and self-belief required for being a true entrepreneur; and they are able to network and find funding and mentoring more easily than ever before.

At the bottom of this trend are government schemes and policies that support and encourage women entrepreneurship, making it easier for them to develop entrepreneurial skills (through skills development programmes) and find institutional finance, infrastructure and talent. As examples, we have the Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) Scheme provided by the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME). TREAD provides subsidy of up to 30% of project cost and the balance 70% as loan to women entrepreneurs. Additionally, there are innumerable schemes launched by banks aimed at women entrepreneurs. In fact, the Bharatiya Mahila Bank, which opened in 2013, and run by Usha Ananthasubramanian – another role model for women in India – focuses on urban and rural unbanked women and helps them establish their businesses.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that the annual growth of the economy could improve 2.4% if India implements pro-growth and pro-gender policies. To truly leverage this trend, India must ensure that women have easier access to education and training, to workshops that address the development of skills such as accounting, marketing, human resource management and production. It is important that women have easier access to trade fairs and conferences in India and abroad, so that they meet others like themselves and interact with buyers in larger markets. And above all, it is imperative that a National Grievances' Forum is set up where the problems that women entrepreneurs face in day-to-day work environments are quickly addressed.

Women entrepreneurs are a precious resource and the trend of growing entrepreneurship among women is most welcome. Women are strong, patient, competitive, resourceful and nurturing by nature. They have the ability to bring innovation and new perspectives to running business – attributes that modern businesses management theories have come to recognize as critical for success. According to World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2014, India's women make up slightly over a third of the workforce and hence their increased contribution to GDP and the ability to create employment could be a game changer for India's economy.

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(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of YourStory)

PROFESSIONAL COURSES NEED TO GET MORE PROFESSIONAL

Financial Express | August 8, 2016

Professional courses need to get more professional



ATUL RAJA

The importance of including entrepreneurship as part of standard curricula cannot be undermined. We can begin by creating a formal culture of entrepreneurship in classrooms



Young Indian entrepreneurs are making headlines with regularity. After an entire generation of cautious Indians who viewed entrepreneurship with suspicion—preferring stable and predictable careers in government service, banks, as doctors, lawyers and engineers—the tide is turning. There is optimism in the air as young entrepreneurs are daring to go global, drive innovation and experiment with unique business models.

The latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report reflects this important cultural shift. The report noted that 58% of Indian adults (18-64 years of age) consider entrepreneurship a desirable career choice and 66% think that entrepreneurs receive a high level of status and respect. And this is not just because Indian tech entrepreneurs are be-

coming global rock stars. It is because young entrepreneurs from every sector—from agriculture to manufacturing—are putting India on a new path of growth and development.

Take the story of 45-year-old PC. Muthafa, who quit a well-paying bank job in Dubai to return to India because he wanted to create job opportunities for the rural youth. He started ID Fresh Food, a dosa batter company with his cousin, 550 square feet of space, two grinders, a mixer and a sealing machine. They began by selling 10 pounds of batter a day. Today, ID Fresh Food sells 50,000 packets a day, has expanded its product range to ready-to-eat foods, and is a ₹100-crore company employing 1,100 people. Muthafa's goal is to become a ₹1,000-crore company employing 5,000 people in the next five years.

While there are successful examples of young innovators like PC Muthafa (ID Fresh), Sampri Bhattacharya (Hydroswarm) and Vijay Sharma (One97), the harsh reality is that an inordinately large number of start-ups fail. That's the reason why academic institutions and organisations must assist and support the development of entrepreneurs in order to ensure high survival rate.

Among the most innovative ideas his company is exploring is that of a TrustShop—in apartment complexes and corporate offices—where you can pick up all-glass bottles, ready-to-eat wheat parathas and chaatni, and drop the money in a box at the store. The store has no salesmen and is not monitored by cameras to keep an eye on shoppers who don't pay. The stores are proving to be a success. Shoppers who don't have money on them are coming back the next day to drop the cash. It is a unique low-cost model that can be scaled, ensuring that prices are kept low and stores are conveniently accessible.

Now let's take the case of 28-year-old Sampri Bhattacharya, whose company Hydroswarm designs and manufactures autonomous drones that can scan ocean

floors, look for lost aircraft, identify oil spills, and spot radiation under the sea.

Entrepreneurs and innovators like these are playing a major role in bringing new ideas, offerings and business models to market—ideas that large companies don't want to explore because they don't have a clear and well-charted future and could pose a risk to their growth plans.

One recent study by a leading analyst has suggested that the vibrant, small and medium enterprise (MSME) sector—which includes such entrepreneurs—will increase its contribution to India's GDP from the 8% share in 2011 to 15% by 2020.

The growth is not just because young Indian entrepreneurs are daring to dream up great new ideas, but also because they understand the value of hiring the best talent in the country. Take Vijay Sharma's (One97) Communications, the digital goods arm of Paytm. Sharma's company announced its expansion into Europe and the US this July, using some of the best business talent in the country to enable the growth. In other words, Indian entrepreneurs are aware of what it takes to be globally competitive.

Going global should not be difficult for Indian entrepreneurs. Today, the best minds in the country are dreaming of entrepreneurship. This year's IIT-JEE topper, Deepanshu Jindal, says that after graduation he wants to become an entrepreneur. Youngsters from prestigious educational institutions all over the country such as the IITs and IIMs are showing similar inclinations.

All this makes great news, but the harsh reality is that an inordinately large number of start-ups fail. Studies have shown that 47% of the jobs created by start-ups are eliminated because the business folds up in the first five years. This emphasises the importance of having academic institutions and organisations to assist and support the development of entrepreneurs in order to ensure a higher survival rate.

If India is to continue on its growth path, the contribution of entrepreneurs to wealth creation will play a pivotal role. This is why the importance of including entrepreneurship as part of standard curricula cannot be undermined. We must begin by creating a formal culture of entrepreneurship starting in classrooms where young minds and the nation's future are shaped.

The author is executive vice-president, Global Marketing, Wadhvani Foundation

labourgap

An enabling force in India's growth story

The demand for reliable and productive labour can be met by employing educated persons with disabilities

Atul Raja

The 2011 census tells us that 6-7% of the population, or 70-90 million people, in India are disabled. The actual numbers are larger. According to a WHO estimate, there are 1 billion Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) globally — which means 15% of the world population, on average, is disabled. Logically, India too will have 15% or more PwDs. But that figure doesn't show up in surveys and studies thanks to the fact that disability is a social taboo and goes unreported. This is in addition to the fact that the definition of disability framed by India fails to effectively identify all PwDs. The Persons with Disability Act, 1995, adopts a medical definition. In reality, society tends to view impairment beyond the medical definition.

But there is hope. Even considering the conservative 6% figure for PwDs, somewhere between 3m to 5m are educated. In 1992, the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People observed that only 100,000 were employed in corporate India — even today not much

has changed. The average employment rate of disabled people in the private sector was only 0.28% and in the public sector it was at 0.34%. A 2008 study commissioned by the Planning Commission showed why the figures were so abysmal: PwDs are unaware of their employment rights, the source of information was employment exchanges and television with both proving to be ineffective, and many states were not observing the guidelines set for employing PwDs. There is lack of social, administrative and political will.

The good news is that labour markets are improving. The IMF forecasts India's growth rate will stay at 7.5% for 2016-17. If this continues, it will lead to an expansion in labour markets. For the next few years, India will look for inexpensive, but reliable, labour — and where will this labour come from? The educated but invisible PwD segment can help fill this gap. This is pool of talent has proven that it is dependable, focused, productive and loyal.

The question is: How do we skill them appropriately for industry requirements in the coming months? The first step is to

focus on policies that protect the rights of PwDs, inform them of the available opportunities, ensure access to training, and create methodologies to fund the training or make loans available to PwDs.

Some of this work has already been initiated. The department of empowerment of persons with disabilities under the ministry of social justice and empowerment has begun to put such steps in place. Simultaneously, the idea of roping in non-profit organisations to assist PSUs (to meet their 5% commitment to hiring PwDs) and private organisations in identifying and training PwDs in emerging industry skills can provide a major boost. These PSUs can focus on creating interactive content for training, find funding for development of new assistive devices and identify models for co-investment with corporate training institutes.

These are not overly ambitious ideas and with a little will, they can become a reality.

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