



Study of Public Relations  
Insights, Nuggets and Trends

**SPRINT**  
2026

**Architects of Trust:  
Why Reputation  
Management is the  
Greatest Asset in an  
AI World**



# Contents...

**About the Study** 3

**Message from the President** 4

1. AI is Reshaping Public Relations 6

2. The New Media Reality 13

**Executive Summary by CEO** 19

3. State of the Industry 22

4. Where Public Relations Must Go to Stay Relevant 32

5. The Talent Equation 39

6. The Industry Speaks 49

**PRCAI Initiatives** 53

**Closing Remarks** 54

# About the Study

The Public Relations Consultants Association of India (PRCAI) has launched the third edition of the Study of Public Relations Insights Nuggets and Trends (SPRINT) 2026.

## Methodology

The study presents the current and future outlook of the Public Relations (PR) industry, explores the trends shaping it, identifies emerging opportunities and examines the challenges and critical issues. The study includes estimates of the size of the PR industry in terms of revenue and people. Consultants are further split by hierarchy and gender.

SPRINT 2026 highlights the requirements of both consultancies and corporate communicators as well as the growth opportunities for the PR industry. Among the key focus areas are the impact of artificial intelligence, the evolution of media, the burgeoning role of reputation in complex business environments of today, and the changing expectations from industry talent.

## The Study Process

The research was carried out using two complementary approaches:

1. **Qualitative Approach:** In-depth interviews to explore new trends, challenges, and opportunities.
2. **Quantitative Approach:** Quantification of the qualitative insights and updating of existing data points.

## Scope of the Study

The study surveyed 143 respondents across the PR industry, encompassing a diverse cross-section of consultancy professionals, from mid to senior practitioners to decision-makers, along with human resource and finance heads.

## Our Partners

The study was conducted and insights generated by Ipsos, one of the world's leading market research agencies. To build a narrative from the survey, PRCAI collaborated with Astrum, India's first research-based strategic communications consulting firm. ●

**Dezma de Melo**  
Research Consultant, PRCAI

# Building a Future-Ready Communications Profession for What's Next



**Kunal  
Kishore**

President, PRCAI

*As expectations of communications continue to evolve, the profession must sharpen its strategic capabilities, adopt emerging technologies responsibly and reinforce its role as a trusted business partner.*

The communications industry has always adapted to change. What distinguishes this moment is not the pace of that change but the breadth of expectations now placed on the profession. For much of its history, communications was valued for a defined set of strengths—storytelling, media relationships, and reputation management. Those strengths remain essential, but they are no longer sufficient on their own. Today's communications leaders are asked to be strategic advisors, business partners, technology adopters and trusted custodians of reputation, often all at once and increasingly at the highest tables of organisational decision-making.

The findings of SPRINT reflect this shift with remarkable clarity. What emerges most distinctly is that the profession is not facing a single challenge; it is undergoing a broader transformation that touches skills, structures and self-perception alike. Discussions around AI have understandably dominated industry conversations, yet the report suggests that technology is only one part of a much larger story. The real transition is towards a communications function expected to deliver deeper business insight, stronger strategic counsel and measurable organisational impact. In other words, the question is no longer whether communications has a seat at the table, but whether the profession is equipping itself to make the most of it.

Nearly 77% of corporate communicators identify strategic thinking as one of the top skills the industry requires. That is a strong signal of where we are headed. It tells us that the conversation has moved decisively beyond execution and output towards judgement, foresight and the ability to connect communication decisions to business outcomes. As expectations evolve, success will increasingly depend on our ability to combine business acumen, strategic judgement and domain expertise with the creativity that has always defined this work. The

most effective communicators of the next decade will be those who can read a balance sheet as comfortably as they craft a narrative.

The report also offers a valuable perspective on talent, and it reframes a familiar concern. The challenge is no longer simply attracting or retaining professionals—it is preparing them for roles that are becoming far more interdisciplinary than before. Business literacy, analytical thinking, sector expertise and the responsible use of AI now sit alongside the storytelling and relationship-building at the heart of the profession. This is not a replacement of old skills with new ones, but a widening of the foundation on which careers are built. Encouragingly, there is clear industry consensus on investing in capability development, professional standards and meaningful measurement—strong indicators of a field committed to continuous improvement rather than incremental change. A profession that takes its own development seriously is one that earns lasting trust.

Equally telling is the industry's approach to Artificial Intelligence. The findings neither overstate its promise nor underestimate its implications, and that maturity is worth noting. AI is improving productivity, accelerating research and reshaping workflows in ways that were difficult to imagine only a few years ago. But the survey is just as clear about the need for stronger skills, sound governance

and thoughtful integration. That balance matters. Adopted carelessly, technology can erode the very credibility it promises to enhance; adopted well, it frees professionals to focus on the higher-order thinking that machines cannot replicate. Technology will change how we work, but trust, judgement and credibility will continue to determine the value communications professionals bring to their organisations.

Taken together, these findings paint a picture of a profession at an inflection point—confident in its enduring strengths, clear-eyed about its gaps, and willing to invest in what comes next. That is a healthy place to be. The organisations and practitioners who thrive will be those who treat this transformation not as a threat to manage but as an opportunity to lead.

As our work evolves, success will be measured not by how quickly we respond to change, but by how deliberately we prepare for it. That responsibility belongs to all of us—and I hope the insights in this report spark meaningful conversations that strengthen both our profession and the value it creates for business and society. ●

## Chapter 1

---

# AI is Reshaping Public Relations

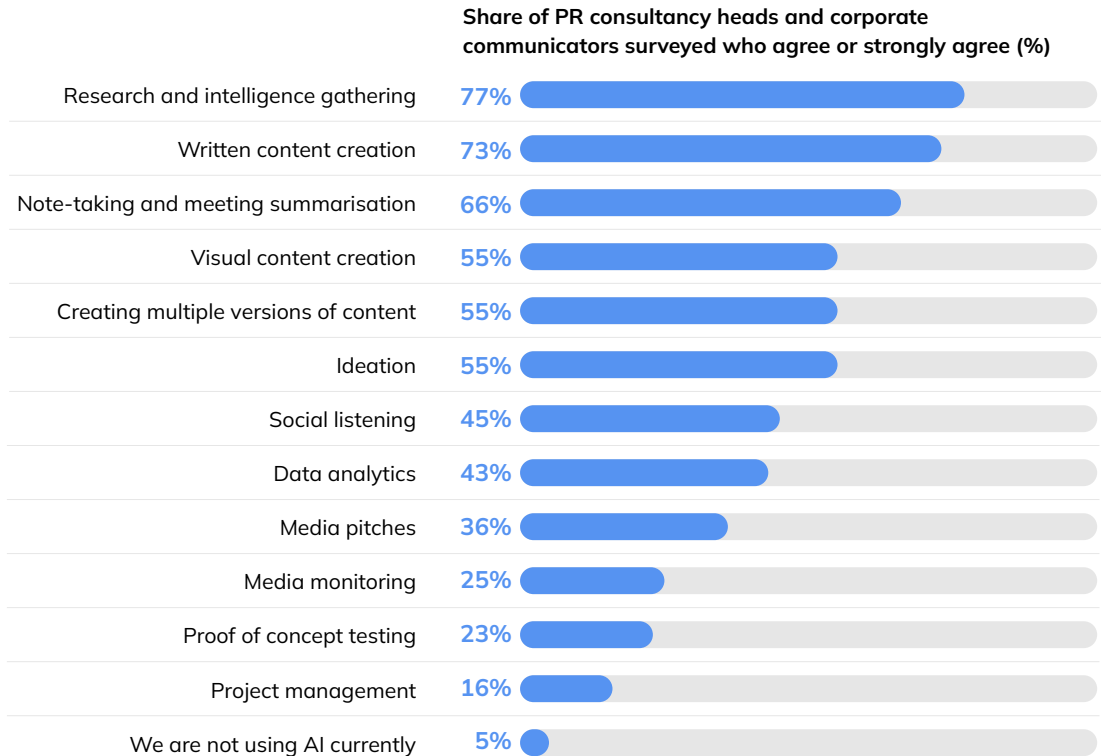
From delivery partner to strategic counsel





## AI is already in the room, doing the heavy lifting, from sourcing intel to shaping ideation

### Activities AI is being used for





### AI is being used for analytical purposes as well as a wide range of creative services

Corporate communicators see AI enhancing PR through **sentiment analysis and analytics**, an area less recognised by PR consultancy heads



#### “ From content to data

We are maximising AI for both creative and analytical work—from data processing and content development to complex video generation. Soon, we also expect AI to play a key role in searching for talent.”

—Ruby Sinha, Founder & Managing Director,  
Kommune Brand Communications



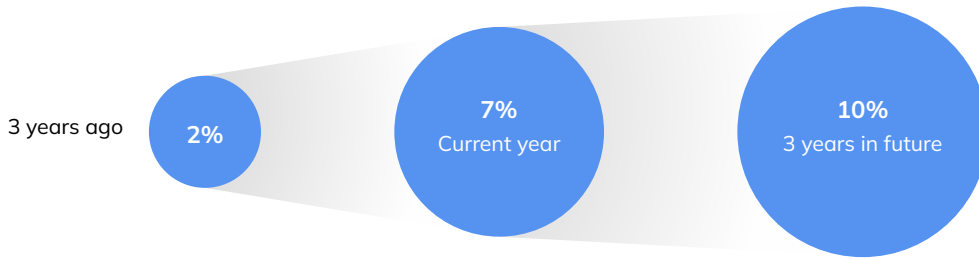
“ My team used an in-house AI tool to create first drafts of social posts, press releases and website content. We also used AI-based tools for media monitoring and analysis, especially during crisis management.”

—Gayatri Rath, Former Communications & Brand Lead for  
International Markets at GE Aerospace



## Public relations firms are betting on AI upskilling and analytics. But the learning curve is steep

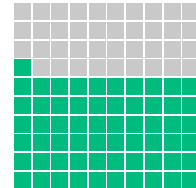
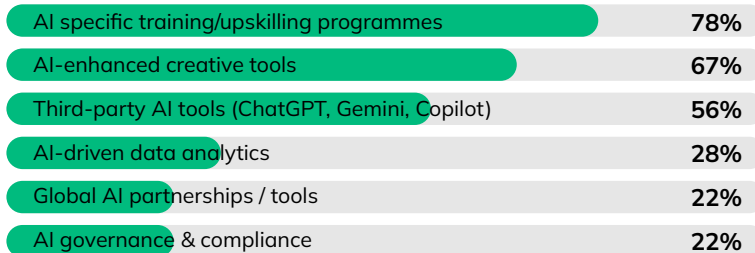
### Investment on AI and technology



### Top investment priorities for AI in the next 3 years

As AI budgets rise, money is clearly flowing towards upskilling & tool adoption first

Share of PR consultancy heads surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



**61%** of PR consultancy heads agree that big data and AI adoption will result in the growth of the PR industry



## AI integration spans all consultancies; large firms lead in analytics, small adopt creative applications

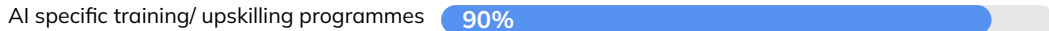
### How AI investment priorities differ based on firm size

Share of PR consultancy heads surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

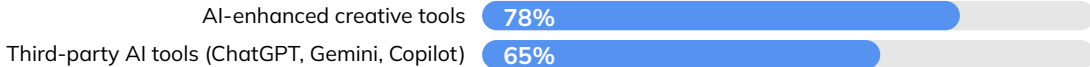
#### Giant & large firms



#### Mid-sized firms



#### Emerging firms



India's diversity of languages, customs, and cultural nuances is still not adequately covered by mainstream LLMs like OpenAI or Gemini, and their derivative tools or copilots. This means we still need to invest in human editorial skills in parallel while investing in AI and the other pieces,"

—Rishi Seth, CEO, Evoc;  
National Chair Public Affairs & Advocacy, PRCAI



### Investment in AI is going up

AI is no longer being used only for content creation, but is steadily becoming a part of business operations. Consultancies are investing in centres of excellence with AI-driven capabilities, reflecting how the PR industry is embracing new-age technologies in a more structured and meaningful way."

—Kunal Kishore, CMD,  
Value 360; President, PRCAI



## The AI dilemma: boosts output but threatens originality, transparency, trust in content

61% of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators say **AI is reshaping and commoditising creativity**



### The Death of Original Thought in PR

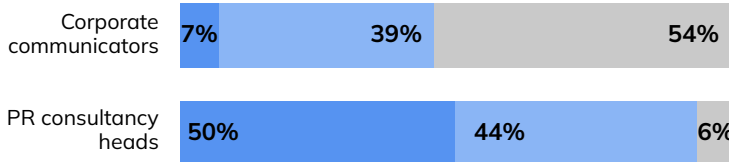
Original thought and individualistic voices are getting lost as people increasingly rely on AI tools, resulting in a lot of rehashed content and leading to a noticeable shift away from unique perspectives. With AI slop flooding feeds and more recently branding and advertising, the need for strong content creation and moderation especially in the corporate domain has never been stronger.”

—Sarah Gideon, Senior Communications leader, Former Head of Communications at Flipkart

### AI usage disclosure

A significant trust gap exists between PR consultancies and corporate communicators on AI usage disclosure.

Share of respondents (%)\* ■ Always disclose ■ Disclose in some cases ■ Do not disclose



85% of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators say that **AI governance frameworks will soon become mandatory for PR**, and that might solve the transparency issue.



### Why human review is non-negotiable

The advantage will not come from AI alone, but from how intelligently it is applied. The winning model is ‘AI powered by human ingenuity’, anchored in judgement, clear guardrails, and responsible use. Our research consistently shows technology accelerates output, but human insight drives relevance, credibility, and impact.”

—Ashwani Singla, Founding Managing Partner, Astrum



## Prioritise readiness for deepfakes and misinformation as strategic risks



### AI misinformation is a top reputational threat

80% of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators say **AI-generated misinformation and deepfakes present a reputational risk.**



### Fake news incidents are becoming common business reality

46% corporate communicators had to **face fake news** in 2025-26, as against 28% in 2024-25.



### When CEOs need AI to prove they're real

With AI generated messaging and deepfakes set to proliferate, misinformation is shifting from a peripheral concern to a core reputational risk. In the next two years, the real test for companies—and for communications leaders—will be whether they can pair smart tools to verify authenticity with clear, practiced crisis playbooks, because the risk is no longer ‘if’ a deepfake appears but how fast we can prove it isn’t real.”

—Malvika Sinha, Chief Client Officer, Ruder Finn

## Chapter 2

---

# The New Media Reality

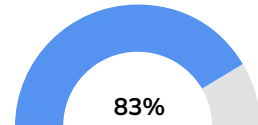
Earned is king, paid is  
suspect, and LLMs are the  
new gatekeepers



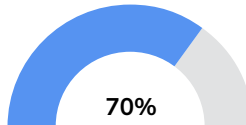


## This is the time of earned media—if you are not in LLM answers, you are invisible

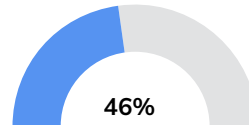
Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



Earned media is gaining importance as LLMs increasingly make content discoverable



GEO (generative engine optimization) is becoming an important PR practice/strategy



AI is making data-led earned storytelling a core PR differentiator



### AI ushering in the 'golden age' of earned media



We're in the golden age of earned media—LLMs are trained to prioritise credible, third-party sources over paid placements. The data is clear: success is shifting from volume to authority, where the stories that rank, surface, and get cited are the ones that shape brand perception."

—Bhavna Jagtiani, CEO, Edelman India

### LLM models are unable to distinguish between a reliable or unreliable source



LLMs currently can't distinguish the authority of *The Wall Street Journal* from *Punjab Kesari*. For a query like "best smartphone under Rs 40,000," they pull only matching info. If your organic storytelling or website doesn't cover it, you won't rank or get discovered. Consultancies are now building tailored LLMs that automatically craft, prioritise, and publish relevant stories for clients, making them discoverable on AI-powered search."

—Chetan Mahajan, Founder & CEO, The Mavericks



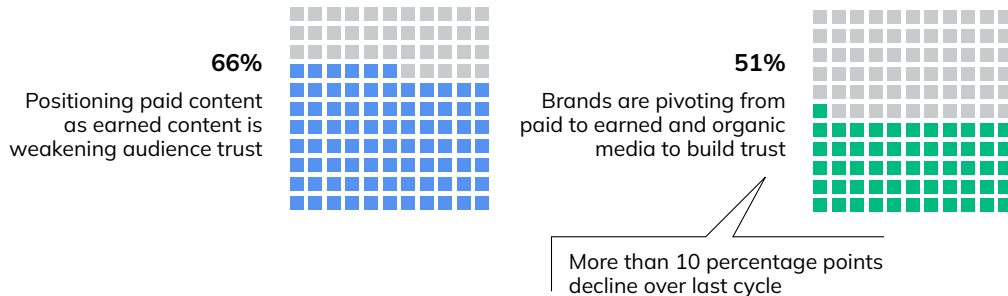
AI is making PR more relevant because reputation discovery now happens on LLMs. The LLM's view of a company is shaped entirely by earned media, making our role in feeding that ecosystem vital."

—Santanu Gogoi, Founding Partner, First Partners; Associate Vice President, PRCAI



## When paid media masquerades as earned, trust breaks down

Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



### Ensuring message accuracy is critical

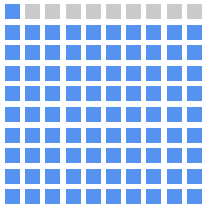
For media and communications, the purpose goes beyond visibility. It is about grounding narratives (with integrity) and connecting them to the right stakeholders. As the boundaries between paid and earned media continue to blur, maintaining message fidelity becomes critical—ensuring reach never comes at the expense of credibility. A balanced approach brings this full circle. When paid, earned, and owned media work as complementary levers—not competing forces—communications moves from chasing attention or volumes to building trust and creating stakeholder value. Ultimately, impact cannot be measured in headlines alone, it should be measured in consistency over volume, credibility over reach, and durable influence.”

—Shipra Singh, Head of Communications, India & South Asia, GE HealthCare

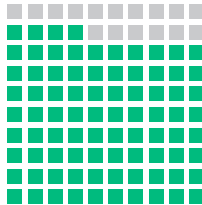


## Regional PR remains critical, and is projected to account for a quarter of Indian PR in 3 years

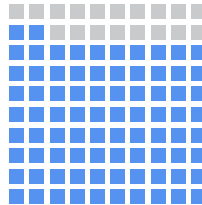
Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



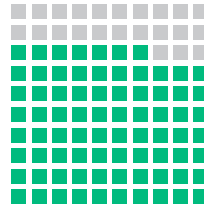
**91%**  
Cultural nuances essential for tailored PR strategies



**84%**  
Regional storytelling gains importance

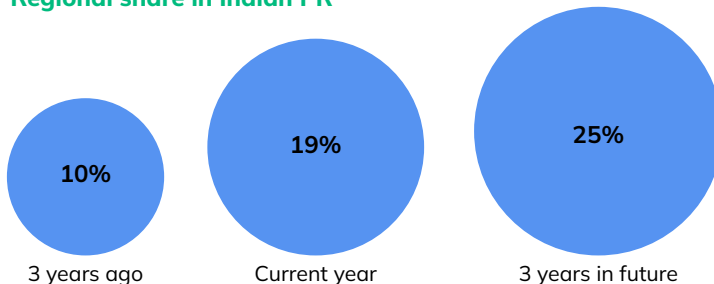


**82%**  
Regional PR mitigates crises through early local awareness



**77%**  
Need to explore storytelling from a fresh perspective by going hyperlocal

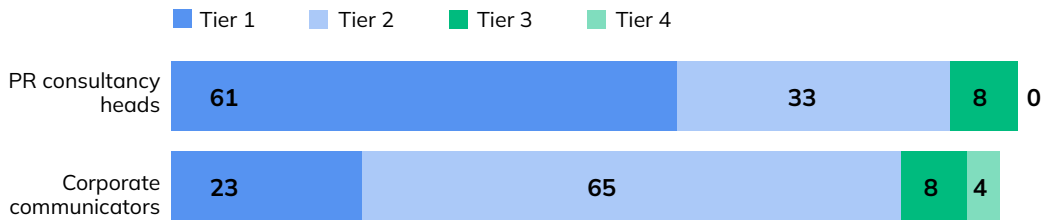
### Regional share in Indian PR





**Tier 2 markets are rapidly gaining momentum. Corporate communicators see them as the main growth driver**

### Which city tiers will drive PR growth in India?



### Local knowledge over broad strategy

As some of the world's and India's largest brands seek new growth opportunities in regional markets, PR cannot remain a metro-led function. Brands will need stories that are rooted in local realities, culture, language and aspirations. Some of the most powerful narratives today are being built from the ground up—starting as local stories and scaling into national conversations. This creates a major growth opportunity for the PR industry: to build deeper regional intelligence, discover grassroots creativity, and convert local momentum into national campaign impact. Tier-2 markets are no longer just distribution points for news. Going forward, they will be the new engines of reputation, relevance and storytelling.

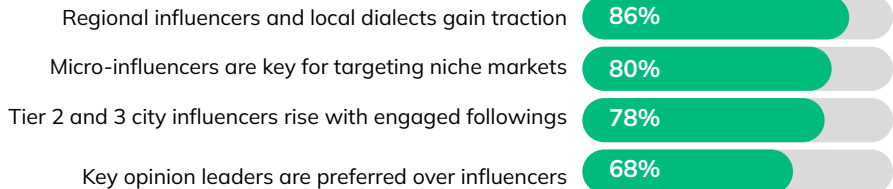
—Dilip Yadav, Founding Partner, First Partners



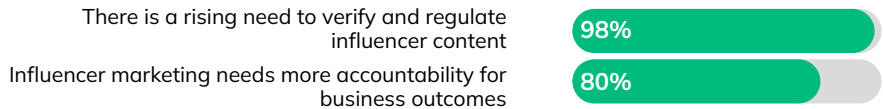
## Influencer is no longer decorative. It's credible and culture-led, but needs more accountability

Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

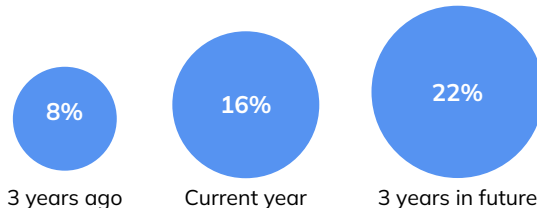
### Growth



### Accountability



### Influencer marketing share in Indian PR



### Micro-influencers are winning the trust game

Influencer marketing hasn't lost relevance—it has found its centre of gravity in local and cultural authenticity. Micro and regional creators in Tier 2, 3, and 4 markets are outperforming macro influencers on trust and engagement. Language influencers, in particular, are redefining impact by speaking in the voice of the audience—not just to them, but as one of them.”

—Mukesh Kharbanda, Managing Director, Fuzion PR Pvt. Ltd.

# Reputation: A Business Currency



**Deeptie  
Sethi**

**Chief Executive  
Officer, PRCAI**

India stands at a defining moment. As businesses navigate economic uncertainty, technological disruption, heightened stakeholder scrutiny, and a fragmented information landscape, one asset has emerged as a decisive competitive advantage: reputation.

PRCAI's SPRINT 2026 (Study of Public Relations Insights, Nuggets and Trends) highlights an industry that is no longer merely supporting business outcomes; it is increasingly shaping them. The Indian public relations industry grew by 11% in FY2026 to reach Rs 3,230 crore (US\$ 361 million) in revenues, accounting for 12.6% of the Asia-Pacific market. While growth remains strong, the moderation from a decade-long CAGR of 12% signals a maturing industry, mirroring global trends

where large communications agencies are reporting slower growth.

The Indian market reflects a similar reality, with industry margins moderating last year. Consolidation continues, with four consultancies crossing the Rs 100 crore revenue mark and leading the sector. Alongside them, eight large firms and 22 mid-sized firms account for a significant share of industry revenues. At the same time, the profession remains diverse, with more than 145 emerging firms and over 500 micro consultancies contributing to innovation, specialisation, and entrepreneurial energy. Talking about innovation, Value 360 Group became India's first listed communications firm, marking a significant milestone in the country's PR landscape.

## From Problem Solving to Business Outcomes

One of the most significant findings from SPRINT 2026 is the shift in how organisations perceive Public Relations (PR). PR is no longer viewed

## Executive Summary

solely as a communications or crisis-management function. Nearly half of respondents believe PR directly drives business outcomes, while more than 40% say CEOs increasingly seek strategic external counsel from communications advisors.

The business value of reputation is evident. An overwhelming 96% of respondents believe PR builds investor confidence and customer loyalty, while 92% say it strengthens stakeholder relationships. Additionally, 83% link strong reputation management to greater crisis resilience, and 75% recognise its contribution to long-term revenue growth. Reputation is no longer an intangible asset. It is a form of business currency and is having a direct impact on enterprise value.

### AI Is Reshaping Communications

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the communications profession at unprecedented speed. Investment in AI has risen from just 2% of budgets three years ago to nearly 7% today. PR firms are deploying AI across research and intelligence gathering, content creation, ideation, social listening, and analytics.

The benefits are clear. AI helps professionals work faster, uncover insights more effectively, and enhance decision-making. However, the survey

also highlights growing concerns that overreliance on AI could commoditise strategic thinking, dilute originality, and reduce creativity.

The opportunity lies not in replacing human judgement, but in augmenting it. Communications professionals who combine AI-driven efficiency with strategic thinking, creativity, and contextual understanding will create the greatest value.

### Authority Will Define Influence

AI is also changing how audiences discover and consume information. As Large Language Models increasingly become gateways to information discovery, brands that are absent from credible third-party sources risk becoming invisible. This may represent a new golden age for earned media. The survey found that 66% of respondents believe disguising paid content as earned content is eroding audience trust, while 51% report that brands are shifting investments toward earned and organic media to strengthen credibility.

In an AI-driven information environment, authority, not volume, will define influence. Visibility alone is no longer enough. Brands must earn trust through authentic engagement, credible storytelling, and meaningful third-party validation.

## The Challenge of Measurement and Talent

Despite the profession's growing strategic importance, measurement remains a persistent challenge. While 92% of corporate communicators agree that the industry needs a standardised measurement framework, fewer than half allocate dedicated budgets for measurement. This gap continues to limit the profession's ability to demonstrate its full business impact.

At the same time, modern communications demands a new generation of talent. Professionals must combine strategic thinking, business understanding, creativity, domain expertise, and technological fluency. While 80% of respondents believe industry knowledge is essential, 77% agree that being 'uni-skilled' is no longer sufficient.

Even in an era of rapid AI adoption, foundational communication capabilities remain critical. Writing skills continue to be identified as a significant gap among emerging and mid-level professionals, while 82% believe that limited understanding of client businesses restricts strategic effectiveness. The communications professional of the future need to converge narratives with business solutions to build lasting reputation.

## A Defining Moment for the Profession

The message from SPRINT 2026 is clear. Reputation has become one of the most valuable assets organisations possess. AI is redefining workflows and audience behaviour. Trust is harder to earn and easier to lose. Measurement is no longer optional, and talent must evolve faster than ever before.

PRCAI sees this moment as both a challenge and an opportunity. Actions to raise the bar through industry research; L&D initiatives such as AIPR, Writing Pen, FTW; standardisation of Client Consultancy Charter and Code of Conduct; and thought-leadership in PRana are catalysts of change for its member community to navigate and future-proof PR.

The question is no longer if public relations is evolving. It already has. The real challenge is whether the profession can seize this moment to strengthen trust, elevate its role, and demonstrate its value to business and society.

The time to act is now. ●

## Chapter 3

---

# State of the Industry

Scale, Structure and Profitability





## India is a fast-growing public relations market in Asia-Pacific, with a 12.6% share and rising



### Global PR revenues, 2025

Rs **213,700**  
**crore**  
(US\$ 23.7 billion)

**Growth:** 6% over 2024

**Key market:** US firms remain the epicentre of PR, accounting for more than half the market

Conversion 1 USD = Rs 90

Source: Provoke Media, and Ipsos analysis

### Asia-Pacific PR revenues, 2025

Rs **25,650**  
**crore**  
(US\$ 2.8 billion)

**Share:** 12% of the global PR market

**Key markets:** China, India, Singapore, Australia, Japan and Southeast Asia

### Indian PR revenues, FY2026

Rs **3,230**  
**crore**  
(US\$ 361 million)

**Growth:** 11% in FY2026, representing 12.6% of Asia-Pacific share

**Key markets:** North & West regions of India remain the two big markets, but South & East regions are emerging and growing at a faster pace.



## After a decade of 12% CAGR, revenue growth is moderating

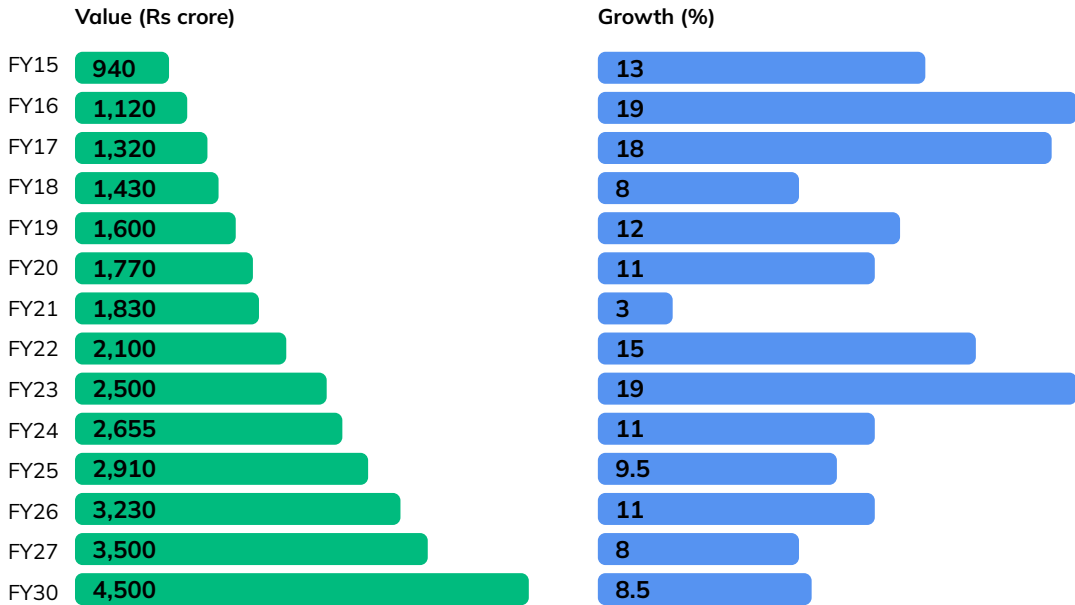
**Rs 2,910 crore**

FY25 revenues

**12%**

CAGR FY15 to FY25

### Indian PR industry size and growth

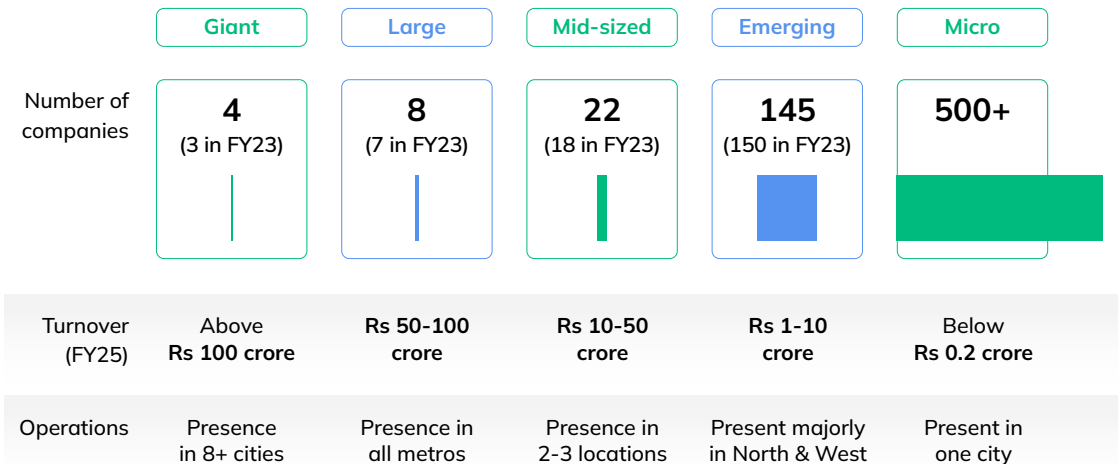


FY = Financial Year (April to March). Eg: FY25 = April 2024 to March 2025. Data from FY26 onwards is an estimate.



## A large but unequal market: 12 firms hold the top, 645+ compete below

### Profile of Indian PR industry by company category



#### Pyramid structure

Only 4 giant firms, 8 large firms and 22 mid-sized firms account for the top tier. But the market still has 145 emerging firms and 500+ micro firms, showing a broad base of smaller players



#### Consolidation

The last 3 years (from FY23 to FY25) indicate consolidation at the top, with mid-sized firms rising and emerging firms staying the largest segment by volume



**12 firms control 70% of the market, but mid-sized firms are growing the fastest (at 16%)**

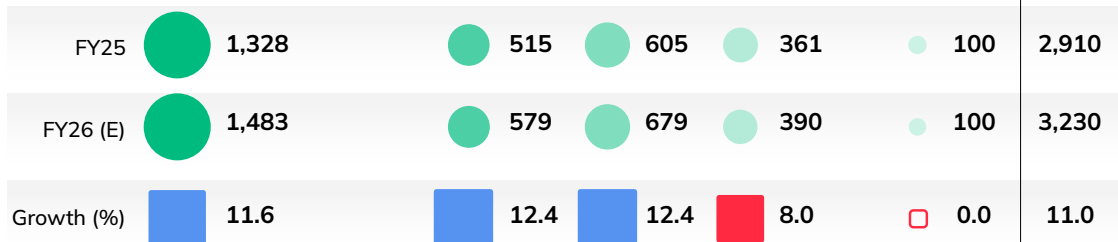
Revenue share by size of PR firm (%)



Estimated revenue growth in FY26 by segment

■ Growth greater than industry average  
■ Growth lower than industry average

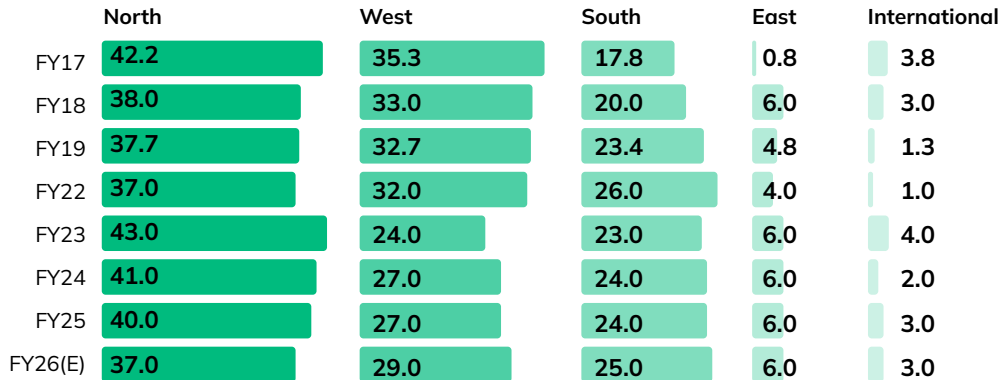
Revenues (Rs crore)





## North India (37%) leads in volume, but West (19%) and South (16%) is where the momentum is

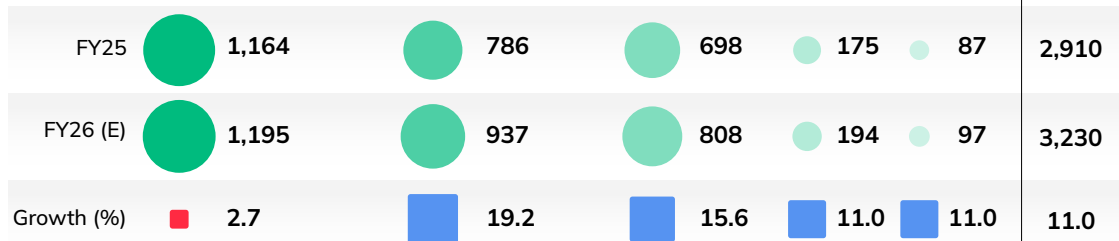
### Revenue share by geography (%)



### Estimated revenue growth in FY26 by geography

■ Growth greater than industry average  
■ Growth lower than industry average

#### Revenues (Rs crore)





## Giant firms consistently report the highest margins, even as industry EBITDA and PAT margins moderated in FY25

### EBITDA margin of PR firms (%)

	FY21	FY23	FY24	FY25	
Giant	32.4	33.0	31.0	30.1	Up to 10
Large	10.0	16.0	16.4	12.7	11 to 15
Mid-Sized	8.5	9.0	8.2	7.0	15 to 20
Emerging	13.3	6.0	11.5	8.5	Above 20
Overall	19.7	22.0	18.5	16.3	

### PAT margin of PR firms (%)

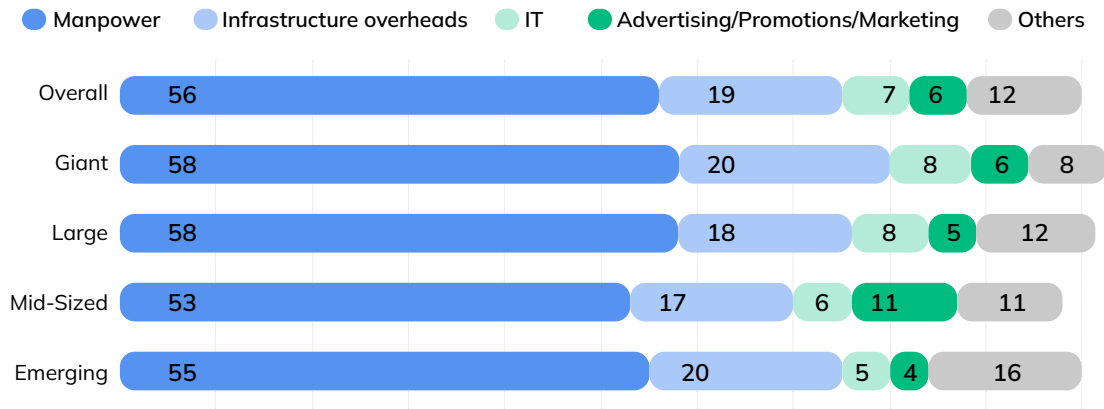
	FY21	FY23	FY24	FY25
Giant	24.0	19.0	18.0	16.0
Large	7.0	13.0	12.0	9.0
Mid-Sized	6.0	3.0	2.0	5.0
Emerging	8.0	4.0	9.0	5.0
Overall	14.0	13.0	10.0	9.0

Note: Above analysis is based on Annual Report information of 98 companies in FY25.



## People productivity remains the key driver of profitability—manpower accounted for more than half of total costs across all firm categories

### Breakup of costs incurred by the organisation in FY25 (%)



### Inflection point in public relations

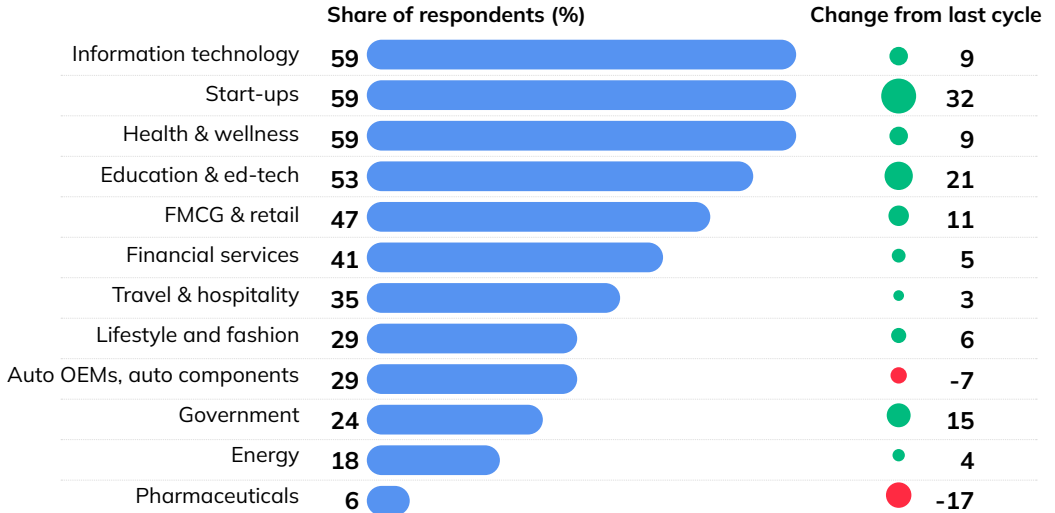
We are at an inflection point in public relations. AI isn't replacing the art of storytelling, it's amplifying it. When you combine the analytical power of AI with the irreplaceable instincts of seasoned communications professionals, you unlock something truly transformative: campaigns built on deeper human insights, faster to scale, and more personal in impact. The firms that invest in upskilling their people with AI won't just adapt to the future of public relations, they will write it."

—Atul Sharma, CEO, Value 360 Communications Ltd



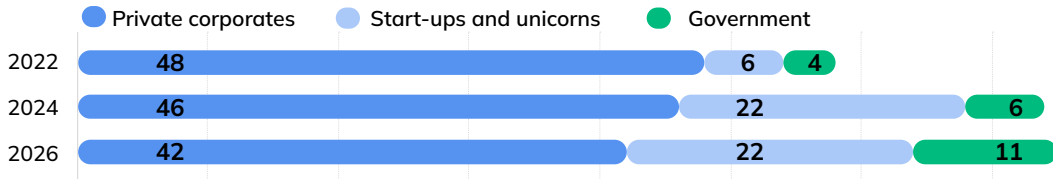
## Start-ups, IT and health are the growth engines. Auto and pharma lose ground

### Top revenue segments (% respondents)



Note: Opinions of PR consultancy heads.

### Revenue share by client category (% respondents)

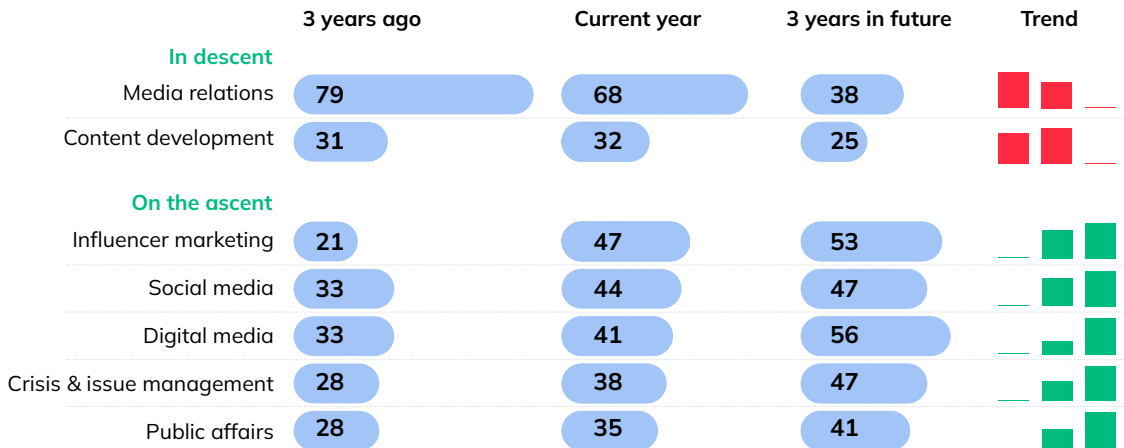


Note: Opinions of PR consultancy heads and finance heads. Numbers do not add up to 100, as only the top 3 client categories are shown.



## Media relations still leads, but influencer marketing and crisis work is where future revenues are

### Top services by revenues (% respondents)



Note: Opinions of PR consultancy heads.



As Gen AI can write the first draft for free, PR consultancies can no longer rely on basic content creation as a primary revenue driver.

## Chapter 4

---

# Where PR Must Go to Stay Relevant

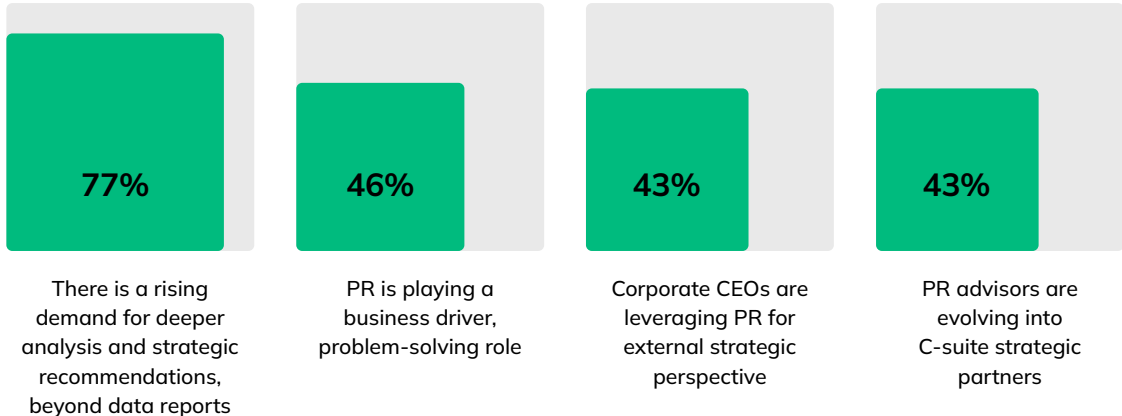
From delivery partner to strategic counsel





## Public relations firms must step up, leading clients with deeper insights and sharper strategy

### Share of corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



### PR will build trust by anticipating risks, navigating stakeholders

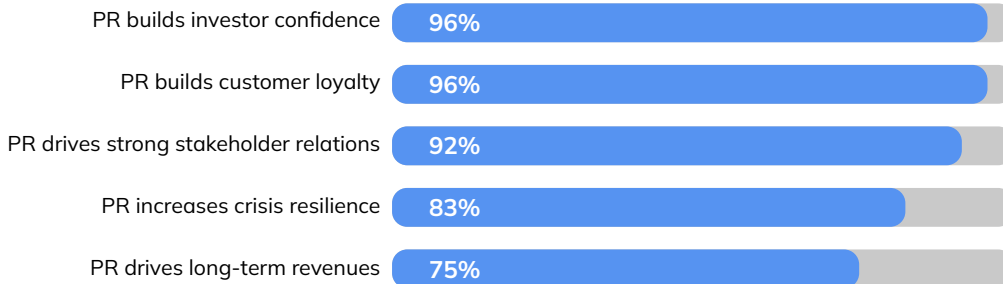
Communications is at an inflection point. As the SPRINT findings indicate, the role is rapidly evolving from narrative building to shaping business outcomes. In an environment defined by policy shifts, technological disruption, and rising stakeholder expectations, the value of communications will be measured by its ability to anticipate risk, guide leadership, and build trust. The opportunity ahead is clear but so is the responsibility. We must move beyond execution to strategic advisory and ensure we are not just part of the conversation, but helping define it.”

—Abhishek Gulyani, Managing Director India and Head of Corporate Affairs APAC, Zeno Group; National Chair Talent & Academia, PRCAI



### Reputation now drives economic outcomes, not just perception

Share of corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



#### “The Rol of Reputation

Reputation creates a competitive advantage that positions a company favourably with all its constituencies and acts as a shield for value protection in a permacrisis world. There is enough data to prove that Reputation as an intangible asset accounts for a significant part of the firm’s market capitalisation. It enhances the success of major strategic initiatives like IPOs, M&As and other change initiatives.”

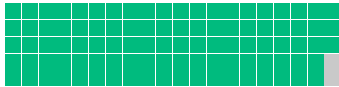
—Madan Bahl, Co-Founder & Managing Director, Adfactors PR



## The share of public relations budget is rising. Clients now demand integrated, not siloed solutions

### PR's share of marketing budgets is gradually increasing

Share of corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



**98%**

Multi-channel strategies are increasingly relevant in today's creator economy



**58%**

PR's role is expanding to include marketing performance outcomes (click through, sales, etc)



**53%**

PR is gaining share from ad and digital agencies as demand for integrated solutions rises



### Lead generation now expected from PR

I am constantly reminding clients that lead generation is the outcome of a larger marketing mix, where Public Relations contributes to building appeal. But in today's integrated world, driving such measurable outcomes is exactly what is expected of us."

—Archana Jain, Founder & CEO, PR Pundit Havas Red



## Retainer + project is the new norm. Pure retainers are losing ground

### 'Retainer + project' is the new king

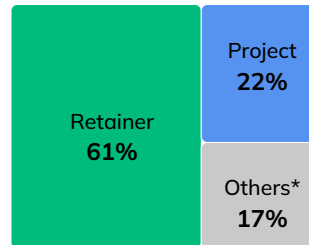


**84%**  
of PR consultancy heads adopt hybrid (retainer + project) models for select clients



**53%**  
of PR consultancy heads say pure retainers still persist among some clients

### PR engagement mix (Industry view)



**63%**  
of PR consultancy heads say project-based engagements expand scope and drive revenue

\* Subscription, impact-linked, freelancer-led, etc

### Top 5 high-revenue project-based PR work

Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



### Shift towards hybrid retainer-project model

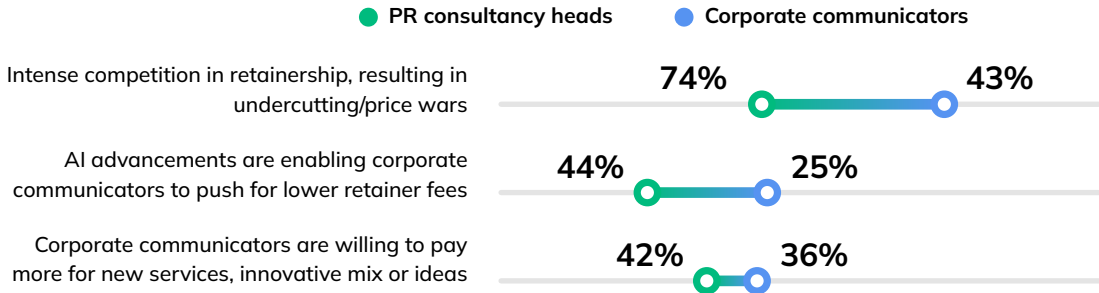


Clients are moving toward hybrid models of fixed fees plus project work, with new business increasingly project-based. Mining existing clients is a priority, as existing PR remits cover only part of their needs. If you have relevant expertise in areas they want to explore, such as influencer marketing, data analytics, strategic consulting, creative support, they are willing to projectise. Some prefer six-month projects or rolling, quarterly retainers over annual contracts, as this helps them manage internal complexities.” —Sunayna Malik, CEO, Archetype India



## Clients assume AI = lower fees. Public relations firms say AI = higher expertise. Both can't be right

### Share of surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



Despite growing demand for innovative PR solutions, **limited willingness to pay** signals a disconnect between perceived and priced value.

### AI and costs: 2 views

#### Corporate communicators

- AI reduces manual effort
- Therefore, PR should be cheaper

#### PR consultancies

- AI requires more oversight & seniority
- Hence, PR should be costlier



### AI will reset PR team sizes and costs

AI is homogenising PR strategy, eroding creative thought, and inducing complacency without generating actual output gains. Though changes aren't instant, AI will alter team setups soon, cutting workforce requirements and restructuring budgets throughout agencies and corporate communications departments."

—Deeptie Sethi, Chief Executive Officer, PRCAI



## Public relations measurement is widely valued but underinvested in. AI-led discoverability and ROO are taking centre stage

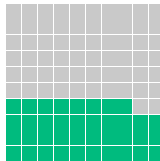
### How companies procure measurement services

Share of corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



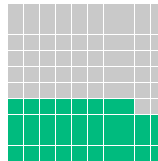
46%

Hiring a specialist media measurement firm



38%

PR consultancy for media measurement



38%

Using AI tools and proprietary measurement frameworks

92%

of corporate communicators agree the PR industry needs a clear measurement system, but only 46% allocate a separate budget for measurement

### Measurement metrics

Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

#### Dominant metrics



#### Emerging metrics



45%

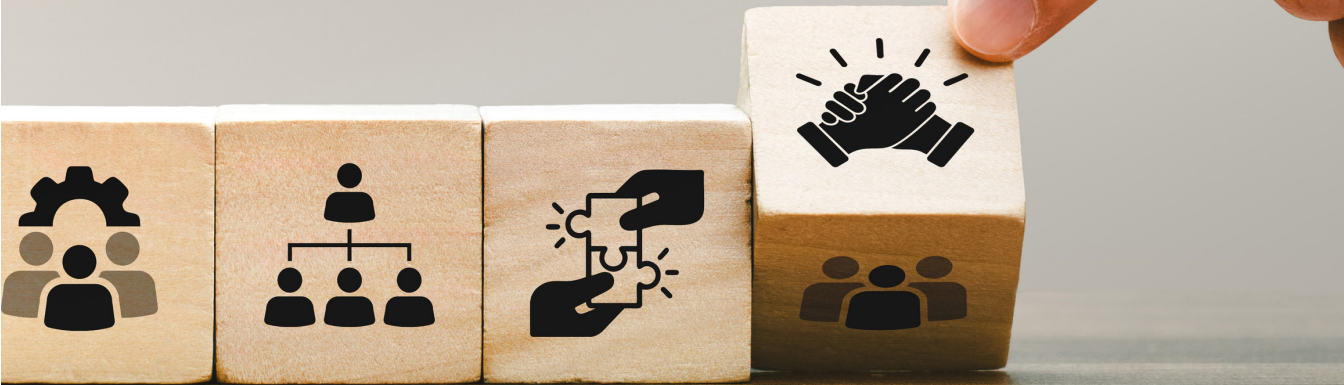
of PR consultancy use AI for social listening

## Chapter 5

---

# The Talent Equation

Talent holds back growth—until you invest to unblock capacity

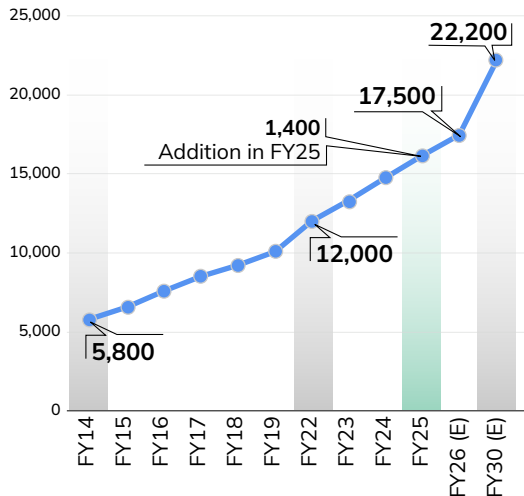




## People are the greatest asset and the biggest cost; women power the public relations workforce

### Employee base

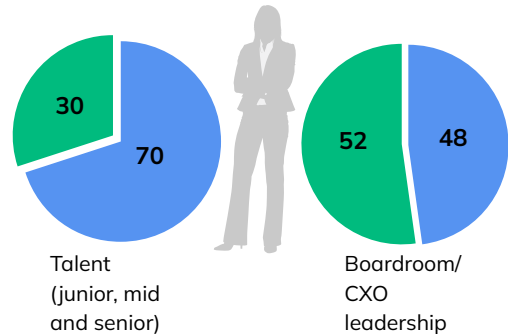
Number of employees in Indian PR industry



### Gender mix

Share of employees in Indian PR industry (%)

● Male ● Female



FY = Financial Year (April to March). Eg: FY26 = April 2025 to March 2026.



### PR colleges feed entry talent

“We hire entry-level freshers directly from communication institute campuses and inbound applications. For associate roles requiring over a year of experience, we recruit laterally.”

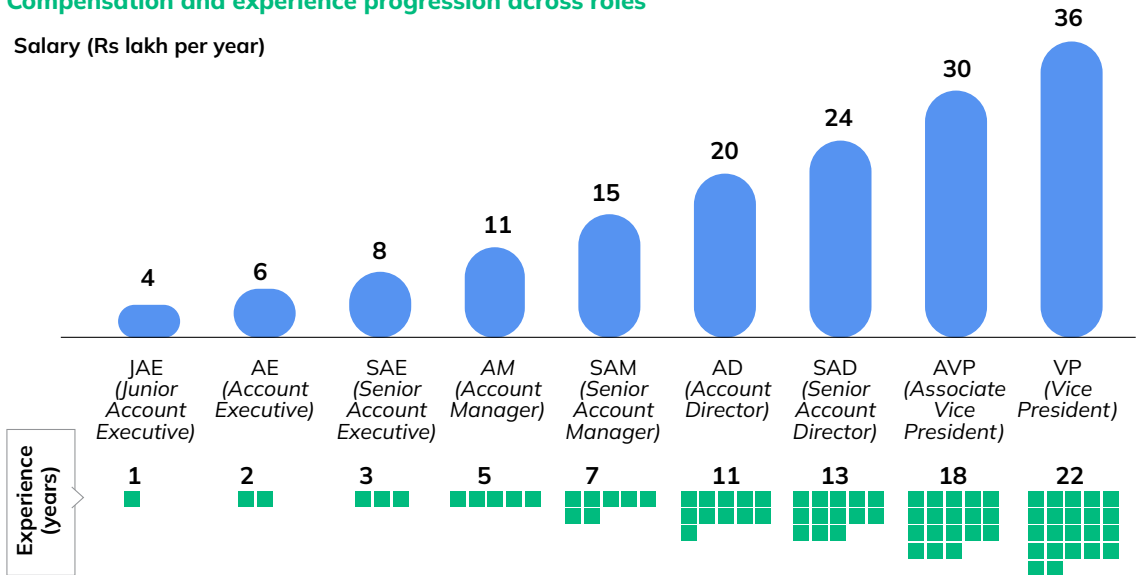
—Vikas Dua, Director People, Weber Shandwick



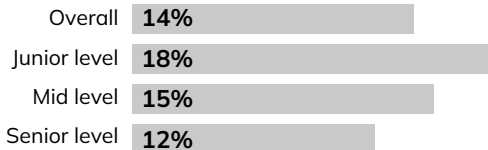
Employee costs consume 55-60% of revenues.  
Career paths are clear

### Compensation and experience progression across roles

Salary (Rs lakh per year)



### Average increment

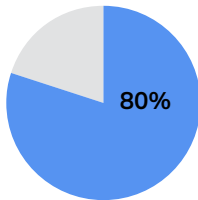


The weighted average compensation-to-revenue ratio stands at ~57-58%, with most firms concentrated in the 50-60% range (~62%).

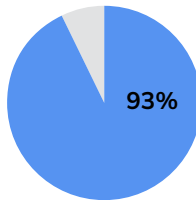


## Deep expertise and multi-skilling essential, as clients split mandates across multiple PR firms

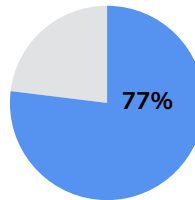
Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



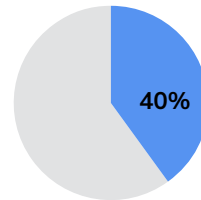
Domain knowledge is essential to be a good PR professional



Continuous upskilling and on-the-job trainings are essential in PR



Being uni-skilled is no longer sufficient for PR professionals



PR mandates are being split across multiple consultancies



### A Question of Fluidity

Client mandates are becoming more fluid and complex. What begins as a media brief can quickly become a policy, digital, reputation, crisis or business advisory conversation. For agencies, this is no longer just a talent question; it's an operating model question. Specialist depth, strategic judgement, and collaboration across disciplines have to be built into how teams are structured, trained and deployed. That is what will help agencies respond to clients.

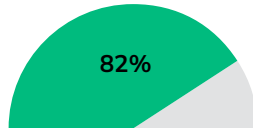
—Neha Mehrotra, Managing Director, Avian We; Vice President, PRCAl



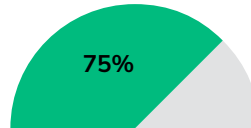
## Public relations talent requires a sharp focus on strategy, AI and business acumen

### Skilling challenges

Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)



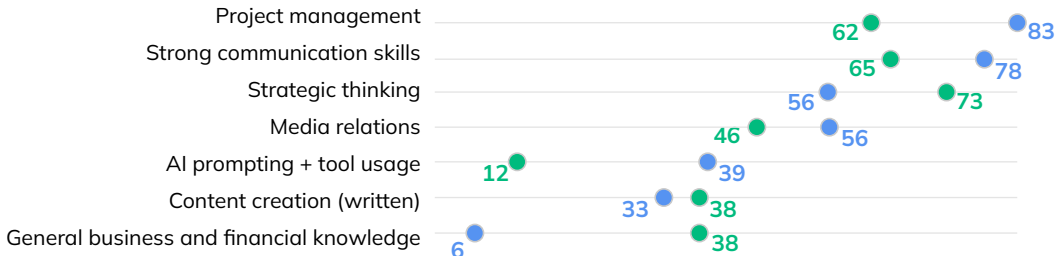
Insufficient understanding of client business is affecting strategic thinking



Writing skills is a big challenge with emerging and mid-level PR professionals

### Top skills required in the PR industry

Share of respondents who agree or strongly agree (%) ● PR consultancy heads ● Corporate communicators



### The New PR Skillset: AI, Finance and Business



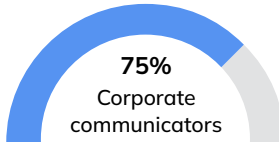
To truly add value, communication professionals must go beyond executional excellence and build strong business and financial acumen, an area where the PR industry has lagged. Writing well and managing media relationships is no longer enough. Today's communicators must think strategically and align with business objectives to contribute meaningfully to decision-making. This requires a deep understanding of industry dynamics, digital ecosystems, AI tools, and financial literacy. The future of PR belongs to those who blend storytelling with strategic insight, bringing both communication expertise and business perspective to the table."

—Seema Ahuja, Former Sr. VP & Global Head of Communications & Corporate Brand, Biocon Group



## Clients demand leaner, dedicated teams as consultancies right-size

### Prefer lean, dedicated PR teams aligned to their business



### PR consultancies are already restructuring teams

Share of PR consultancy heads and HR heads surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

Let go of weaker performers	67%
Reassigned staff across practices/geographies	44%
Replaced senior exits with hires at a lower level	41%
Introduced performance improvement plans (PIPs)	38%



“A flatter agency structure is definitely needed. Having several Vice Presidents on an account who are unavailable to the client makes no sense. On paper, one has a large team, but when it comes to actual execution, there are only one or two people doing the work. This needs to change and I already see this happening with some agencies.”

—Shefali Sapra, VP Corporate Communications, Diageo India (USL)



### Raising the Bar



Consultancies are realigning strategically, building talented and lean teams that balance sound strategy with exemplary execution. Clients must acknowledge and appreciate the consultancy model, be razor sharp on objectives and terms of engagement, and not conflate leaner for cheaper. Therein lies the opportunity—to create high standards for our industry that elevate and entrench our role as a management discipline in today’s complex environment.”

—Nandita Lakshmanan, National Chair, Growth and Industry Standardisation, PRCAI

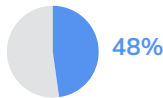


## Capability gaps at the top collide with rising aspirations at the bottom

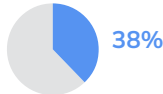
Share of PR consultancy heads and HR heads surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

### On senior management

Lack of learning mindset at senior leadership levels is creating challenges for PR consultancies

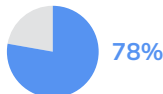


Mid to senior PR leaders have limited pathways to boardroom and CXO-level roles

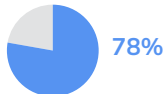


### On Gen Z/young talent

Gen Z/young talent expect early involvement in strategy-related work



Gen Z/young talent gets dissatisfied with report-heavy work

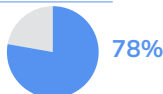


### How to get the best out of Gen Z

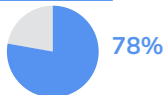
Showing the purpose and impact of their work



Flexible working models



Regular feedback and recognition



The most important training we need is for senior managers to prepare for larger leadership roles. Training must start at the top, because when leaders are equipped to handle pressure gracefully, that resilience trickles down through the entire organisation.”

—Naina Bhalla, EVP, Growth & Strategy, Value 360 Communications



Gen Z wants to skip the foundational grind of media lists and jump straight into strategy meetings. This, combined with their strict prioritisation of work-life balance in a 24/7 industry where client crises require stretching hours, creates a major mismatch in expectations.”

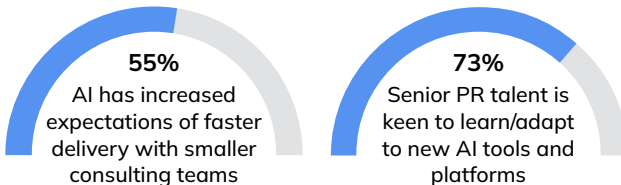
—Abhishek Shankar, National HR Director, Avian We



## AI is raising delivery expectations faster than talent can adapt

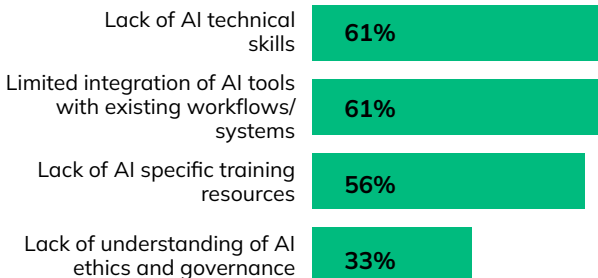
Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

### AI expectations and preparedness



### Biggest AI capability gaps

Share of PR consultancy heads who agree or strongly agree (%)



### Faster, Sharper, and AI-Powered



The gap is no longer between agencies that have AI and those that do not. Everyone has access. The real gap is between teams that use AI to think better, faster, and deeper, and teams that still treat it like a drafting shortcut."

—Vivek Rana, Managing Partner, Gnothi Seauton; National Chair Learning & Thought Leadership, PRCAI



### High Enthusiasm, Low Expertise

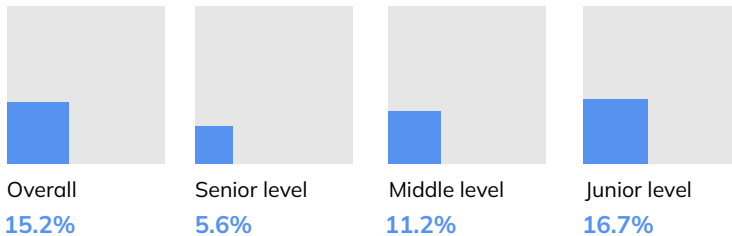
Everyone is jumping on the AI bandwagon, but few actually know how to use it effectively. Younger professionals eagerly use tools like ChatGPT, but often just copy-paste basic prompts. We urgently need to train them to use AI to our strategic advantage."

—Consultancy Senior Talent



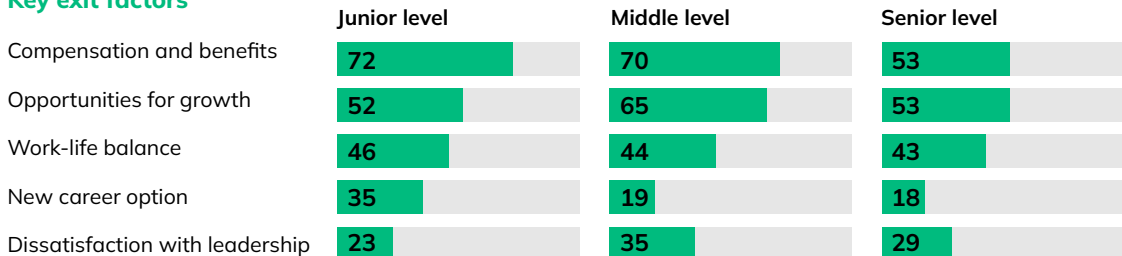
## One in six staff will leave this year—and it’s mostly the middle that leaves

### Attrition rate



63% of PR consultancy heads and HR heads report rising difficulty in retaining entry- and mid-level talent.

### Key exit factors



### Attrition is Expected, Not Exceptional

“Talent movement is no longer an exception in our industry - it is a pattern. When mid-level professionals become the most vulnerable, it signals a deeper need to rethink how we build, support, and retain our people.”

—Dhun Chhokar, Lead: Digital and Visual Storytelling, ON PURPOSE



## Hybrid work here to stay as public relations talent rejects 5-day office model

### Current working model

Work from office (5 days a week)

30

Hybrid: 3–4 days office

56

Hybrid: 1–2 days office

8

Completely remote

3

Flexible (employee choice)

3

Share of respondents (%)\*

\* As per PR consultancy heads and HR heads



### Full-time office return unlikely

The modern workplace requires balancing traditional expectations with our workforce's desire for flexibility. Remote work boosts efficiency but demands intentional effort to build a strong, unified culture. Our hybrid approach strategically dedicates in-office days to purposeful connection and collaboration. This ensures we foster a dynamic environment where both individual potential and collective success are maximised.”

—Dolly Tayal, Managing Director, Burson India; National Chair Marketing Communications & Global Network, PRCAl

### Should PR industry return to a 5-day work-from-office model?

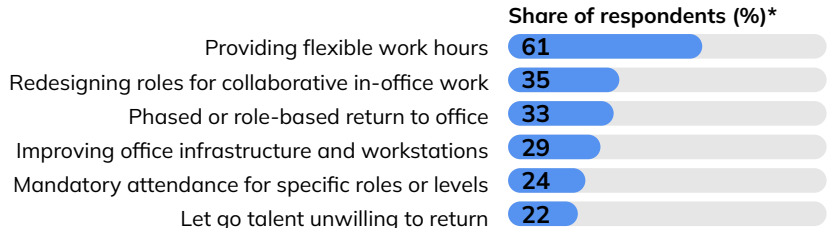
Yes

50% of PR consultancy heads

No

77% of talent

### Actions consultancies will take to support a full 5-day work-from-office model



## Chapter 6

---

# The Industry Speaks

What PRCAL must deliver next





### 6 clear mandates. Led by 3 priorities: training, standards, and advocacy

PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators identified priorities under 6 themes. And this is what they said under them.

#### Theme 1: Training & Upskilling

39%



“Current generation training programmes on industry tool and technology development and usage.”

“Quarterly webinar for knowledge sharing for HR leader.”

“More online upskilling sessions for junior-mid level professionals.”

“Help in embracing Digital & AI transformation.”

“More training and skill developments workshops and seminars to upgrade our PR game.”

“Capability building for future of communications, training, forums, guidance around AI, digital influence.”

#### Theme 2: Industry Standards & SOPs

33%



“Standardisation of processes.”

“Continue to define, reinforce, actively uphold industry standards.”

“Guidelines to clients on how to treat people from agencies.”

“Guidelines to HR department of agencies not reach out to or hire people who have joined or changed their job in less than one year.”

“Support on compliance and roll out of new wage code, menstrual leave and other regulatory requirements.”

#### Theme 3: Networking & Community

32%



“Build opportunities to bring the community together for communicators that are not limited to senior leadership.”

“Bring together peers across India for networking.”

“Facilitating closer collaboration between agencies, corporates and media.”

“Support young PR professionals; more networking sessions for the younger employees.”



## 6 clear mandates. Led by 3 priorities: training, standards, and advocacy

PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators identified priorities under 6 themes. And this is what they said under them.

### Theme 4: Talent & Work Culture



25%

“Work life balance should be encouraged across all career stages especially for the mid-senior professionals with 10-15 years of experience. While retaining Gen Z talent has led to greater flexibility for them, the resulting pressure is often absorbed by the millennials. This imbalance needs a thoughtful course correction at an organisational level.”

“To represent the needs of the talent in the PR fraternity (better work culture/practices) and not just the business goals of agencies.”

### Theme 5: Industry Advocacy & Voice



22%

“Representation of young leaders in decision making to include diverse voices. Times are evolving, PRCAI should too.”

“Increasing importance of communications among C Suite.”

“Be more democratic and not only agency-centric. Corporate communications needs to have a greater pie for PRCAI to become the true body representing the community.”

“Advise the PR consultancies to move away from traditional PR and work with the new formats.”

### Theme 6: Measurement & Benchmarks



22%

“Stronger industry benchmarks and practices.”

“Bring ethical practices in AI adoption.”

“Encourage the industry to adopt measurement metric closely aligned to marketing or business outcomes than AVE or random measurement.”



## Measurement and conduct: The 2 pillars the industry needs PRCAI to strengthen

### Share of respondents who agree or strongly agree (%)

Share of PR consultancy heads and corporate communicators surveyed who agree or strongly agree (%)

#### PR consultancy heads



#### Corporate communicators



### PRCAI Member Speak

“Elevating the PR industry requires standardising both measurement and RFPs. Beyond that, clients must recognise the value of our people: if you want good talent, you have to pay.”

“We need an industry-wide code of conduct for media engagement. Establishing clear rules for how PR professionals and journalists interact will create amazing harmony and collaboration between the two.”

“The PR industry needs governance and structure around RFPs. Just like in the advertising world, agencies must be compensated for their time and the ideas they bring to a pitch, rather than giving them away for free. We urgently need to set an industry benchmark for this process.”

# PRCAI Initiatives



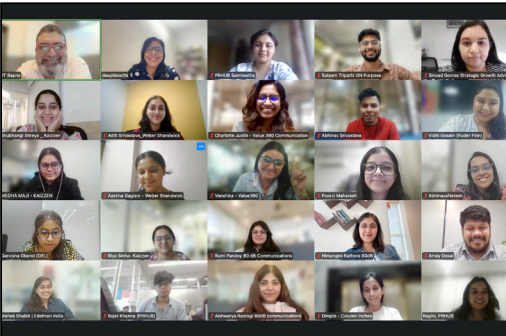
Smt. Smriti Irani, Former Cabinet Minister, unveiling the PRCAI Survey Report at PRCAI PRana 2025



PRCAI Academia Conclave: Inspiring the aspirants



2025 PRCAI Annual General Meet with member community



Writing Pen 2.0 in the Age of AI: PRCAI Training for young professionals



Recognising and celebrating world-class campaigns at SABRE SA and Prologue

# Embrace the New Balance



**Deepak  
Hanumantharayappa**

**Partner & Country  
Lead, Ipsos Strategy3**

**T**he public relations industry is undergoing a fundamental reset, driven by the acceleration of digital adoption and the growing complexity of the stakeholder landscape. As this report highlights, PR is moving beyond its traditional roots into a more strategic, data-driven discipline that directly influences business outcomes.

The rise of artificial intelligence and analytics is transforming how communication is created, delivered, and measured. Yet, in an ecosystem increasingly defined by scale and speed, trust has become the ultimate differentiator. Reputation is no longer a by-product of communication; it is its core objective, especially in a landscape marked by misinformation, fragmented audiences, and shrinking attention spans.

At the same time, the media environment is evolving. Regional narratives, hyperlocal storytelling, and creator-led influence are redefining how brands engage with stakeholders. This shift demands that PR professionals move from broadcasting messages to building meaningful, culturally relevant conversations across platforms.

Most importantly, PR is transitioning from execution to counsel. Organisations today expect sharper insights, risk anticipation, and measurable impact, placing communications at the heart of strategic decision-making. This calls for a new blend of skills: strategic thinking, business understanding, and fluency in technology.

The direction is clear. The future of PR lies in balancing technology with human judgement, and scale with authenticity. Those who embrace this shift will not just adapt to change, but lead it. ●



The Public Relations Consultants Association of India is the most influential and credible communications body in India. It was formed 25 years ago with the aim to progress the Indian Public Relations industry to be one of the most sought-after industries to work for. We represent a diverse and strong gamut of communication professionals in the country and advocate excellence and merit in the profession. We empower our members to succeed at every stage of their business and career goals in the industry. We believe in building an ethical, professional and progressive community to further the cause of the Public Relations industry.



## CONTACT

Kunal Kishore, President PRCAI | [president@prcai.org](mailto:president@prcai.org) | +91 9899797809

Deeptie Sethi, CEO PRCAI | [ceo@prcai.org](mailto:ceo@prcai.org) | +91 9811101383

Dezma de Melo, Research Consultant | [dezma.demelo@prcai.org](mailto:dezma.demelo@prcai.org) | +91 9821231549



Design: How India Lives ([www.howindialives.com](http://www.howindialives.com))

Photos: iStock