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REPUTATION IN THE
WORLD OF
Hard Power

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HAVAS** Red

PRCAI PRologue & SABRE South Asia 2026

Reputation in the World of Hard Power

The St. Regis
Mumbai | Monday, July 13, 2026

Time

Programme

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Delegate Registration Begins

Own the spotlight in vibrant Red or timeless Black with a touch of Silver at #PRologue2026 as we celebrate the power of reputation.

3:40 pm – 3:50 pm

The Reputini — Pre-Award Mixer & Toast

Raise a Toast- Sip. Socialise. Shine.

3:50 pm – 4:00 pm

Doors open inviting you for a sit-down

(Ballroom entry closes sharp at 4:05 pm)
Find your seat as inspiring stories of our partners fill the screen.

4:15 pm – 4:20 pm

PRCAI Welcome

Introduction remarks by **Neha Mehrotra, Vice President, PRCAI.**

4:21 pm – 4:31 pm

Industry's Next 25

PRCAI updates and opening remarks on 'Reputation in the World of Hard Power' from **Kunal Kishore, President, PRCAI** and **Deeptie Sethi, CEO, PRCAI.**

4:32 pm – 5:17 pm

PRologue Conversation: Reputation in the World of Hard Power

Paul Holmes, Founder, CEO, and Editor-In-Chief, PProvoke Media moderates a dialogue with **Atul Dhawan, President, The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE)** & **Fmr. Deloitte South Asia, Amit Narayan, Partner, Control Risks, and Arpana Ahuja, EVP and Head, Corporate Brand & Communications, Jindal Steel.**

5:18 pm – 5:48 pm

Section 1: SABRE South Asia Awards

SABRE South Asia Preface by **Paul Holmes, PProvoke Media**
The jury showcase unfolds and the awards take the spotlight.

5:49 pm – 6:19 pm

Celebrating the AIPRodigies 2026

Recognition & felicitation of PRCAI AIPR Spring 2026 winners led by **Santanu Gogoi, Associate Vice President, PRCAI** and **PRCAI Leadership.**

6:20 pm – 7:20 pm

Section 2: SABRE South Asia Awards

The awards continue with special address from the 'Company CEO of the Year'.

7:21 pm – 7:50 pm

Section 3: SABRE South Asia Awards

A group tribute honouring the recipients of the 'Certificates of Excellence.'

7:51 pm – 8:00 pm

Vote of Thanks

Closing remarks by **Santanu Gogoi, Associate Vice President, PRCAI.**

8 pm onwards

Cocktails & Dinner

A night of stories, conviviality, and connections.

#WeValYou

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Kunal Kishore

President, PRCAI, Group CEO and Co-Founder
V360 Group

PR's Most Consequential Decade

Trust Is the Ultimate Influence

This is one of the most consequential moments our profession has ever been handed. The forces reshaping the world are reshaping it around the very thing we do — the building of trust — and that places our industry closer to the centre of decisions than it has ever been. The room is changing, and it is changing in our favour.

We are living through an era of hard power. Technology platforms shape what people know and believe. Governments redraw markets overnight. A decision taken in one capital reorders businesses thousands of miles away. Capital, information and attention are concentrating in fewer hands. It is a harder, more contested world than the one many of us started our careers in.

And here is the quiet irony at the centre of it. The harder power becomes, the more valuable the one thing power cannot manufacture — trust. You can command attention. You can compel compliance. You cannot force people to believe you. Belief has to be earned, and earning belief is precisely what our profession does. In a world of hard power, that turns out to be the softest and the strongest currency of all.

From Explaining Decisions to Shaping Them

For a long time, reputation was treated as something built slowly and managed carefully — say the right things, tell good stories, stay visible, respond when challenged. That model is fading, and its passing is the best news our industry has had in a generation.

Today, almost every serious business decision is also a reputational decision. How a company adopts AI. How it treats people through a restructuring. Which markets it enters and which it walks away from. What it says on the questions that matter to its stakeholders — and what it chooses not to say. These decisions cannot be handed to communications after the fact, to be explained and dressed up. Reputation has to have a voice while the decision is still being made.

That is the opportunity of a lifetime in this profession. We are moving from managing perception to advising power — from the people who carry the message out, to the people in the room when the message is decided. Few industries are handed a shift this large. Fewer still are this ready for it.

Visibility Is Not Influence

We have always understood visibility. But visibility is quietly losing its value. You can own a news cycle and still not be believed. You can trend on Monday and be forgotten by Tuesday. You can have millions of followers and almost no influence in the one moment that actually counts.

Hard power raises the bar, because stakeholders are asking harder questions. Who has been consistent? Who showed up before the crisis, and not only during it? Whose expertise is real? Reputation, we are learning again, is built in the years when nobody is watching and tested in the moments when everybody is.

India's Moment

Nowhere is this opportunity larger than here — and nowhere does it matter more for us.

Indian companies are no longer competing only at home. Our founders sit on global stages, our capital markets are drawing serious international attention, and our technology and talent are being taken seriously in rooms that once did not keep a chair for us. A wave of Indian businesses has gone public and stepped onto the world's balance sheet in just the last few years. Ambition, we have in abundance.

But global ambition asks for global reputation, and that cannot simply be a louder version of what we already do. It has to be more sophisticated. It means understanding how a stakeholder in Frankfurt or Singapore hears a claim differently from one in Delhi; how a regulator reads a silence; how a single geopolitical sensitivity can turn a routine announcement into a liability. This is the work the Indian PR industry is now being handed — not to help our organisations tell better stories, but to help them understand the world those stories will land in, and the consequences of the decisions underneath them. It is a bigger, harder and far more valuable job than the one we were once asked to do. We should take it.

The Communicator as Counsel

That work needs a different kind of communicator. Media craft will always be our foundation, but it now has to sit alongside a real grasp of business, policy, technology, culture and risk. The communicator of the future has to be able to read the room before advising the boardroom. Building that person — through training, through standards, through a genuine investment in talent — is one of the most important things we can do together, and it is much of the reason an association like ours exists.

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Trust Begins at Home

There is one more thing we owe ourselves the honesty to say, because it is the whole argument turned back on us. If trust is the ultimate influence, then the profession that trades in trust has to be trustworthy first. That is not automatic. Undisclosed arrangements, content passed off as something it is not, the temptation of AI to generate at scale what used to be earned — these are real, and they are ours to answer for. I would far rather we confront them from the front than have them pointed out to us from outside.

An industry that disciplines itself on disclosure, on ethics, on what is real in an age of synthetic everything, does not merely protect its own reputation. It earns the right to advise everyone else on theirs. To me, that is the surest source of our future authority.

Our Opportunity

So this is the moment I want us to seize — not defensively, but with confidence. To take our place at the centre of the decision. To trade visibility for genuine influence. To hold ourselves to a standard high enough that our counsel is always worth taking. The conditions for the most consequential decade in the history of Indian public relations are already in place. What remains is for us to be worthy of it.

Hard power will always command attention.

Reputation decides who people choose to believe.

And that — the ability to be believed when it matters most — is the one form of influence that cannot be bought or imposed. It has to be earned. Earning it is our craft, our responsibility, and, I am convinced, our extraordinary opportunity in the years ahead.



Deeptie Sethi
CEO, PRCAI

Hard Power Commands Attention, Reputation Commands Trust

The traditional understanding of hard power has centred on military capability, economic strength, technological leadership and geopolitical influence. Yet, in today's interconnected world, these aspects alone are no longer sufficient to command global leadership. The latest PRCAI industry report, The Study of Public Relations Insights, Nuggets and Trends (SPRINT) 2026, suggests that reputation has emerged as the invisible force that helps navigate the hard power, transforming communication from a support function into a strategic capability.

The Influence of the Indian Public Relations Industry

The evidence is striking. According to SPRINT 2026, India's public relations industry grew by 11% in FY26 to reach ₹3,230 crore and is projected to expand to ₹4,500 crore by 2030, accounting for an increasingly significant share of the Asia-Pacific communications market. More importantly, the report notes that the industry's decade-long growth trajectory is now evolving into one of maturity, where strategic influence matters more than scale alone.

This mirrors a larger global trend. Nations today compete not only through defence budgets or GDP rankings but also through their ability to inspire trust among investors, citizens, allies and markets. Reputation is increasingly playing a significant role in determining whether capital flows in, where supply chains relocate, how talent migrates, and whether strategic partnerships flourish. Hard power creates capability, while reputation determines whether others choose to engage with it. As Public Relations practitioners, we need to learn to deal with this hard power around us, navigating stakeholders, perceptions and relationships.

The PRCAI findings reinforce this shift. An overwhelming 96% of corporate communication leaders believe reputation builds investor confidence, while another 96% say it strengthens customer loyalty. Further, 92% associate strong reputation with better stakeholder relationships, 83% believe it enhances crisis resilience, and 75% say it contributes directly to long-term revenues. These numbers suggest that reputation is no longer merely an outcome of business success, but it is increasingly contributing to business performance itself.

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Who is Consuming Public Relations?

The implications extend well beyond corporations. Governments too appear to recognise reputation as a strategic national asset. The report reveals that government's share of PR mandates has nearly tripled, from 4% in 2022 to 11% in 2026. Simultaneously, start-ups have expanded their share from 6% to 22%, reflecting growing recognition across both public and private sectors that strategic communication is essential for building authenticity, public trust and investor confidence across stakeholders.

This evolution becomes especially relevant in an era shaped by geopolitical situations and Artificial Intelligence (AI). As countries invest heavily in manufacturing expansions, digital infrastructure and advanced technologies, perceptions increasingly influence outcomes. It is narratives, not just boardroom actions, that increasingly shape hard power.

The Influence on Business

Perhaps the strongest indication of this shift is organisational behaviour. Nearly 46% of communicators now believe PR directly drives business outcomes, while more than 40% report that CEOs increasingly seek strategic counsel from communication advisors. Reputation is moving from the communications department into the boardroom, becoming integral to business strategy, risk management and long-term value creation.

Technology is the Catalyst

PRCAI's SPRINT 2026 report also captures this technological transformation. AI is reshaping communications, with 77% of firms using AI for research and intelligence gathering, 73% for content creation, and 66% for meeting summarisation and knowledge management. However, rather than replacing reputation management, AI is making trust even more valuable. As information becomes abundant and synthetic content proliferates, authentic credibility becomes a differentiating strategic advantage.

Reputation Is the Force Multiplier

The lesson is equally relevant for nations. Economic reforms, technological capability and military preparedness remain the foundations of hard power. But in a world where trust influences investment, diplomacy, innovation and resilience, reputation has become the force multiplier that unlocks the full value of these capabilities.

The SPRINT 2026 report validates some of these shifts for the communications industry. It signals a structural shift in how influence is created. Hard power may win attention, but reputation sustains influence. In the twenty-first century, the strongest nations and organisations will not simply be those with the greatest capabilities; they will be those whose capabilities are trusted, respected and believed.

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Paul Holmes

Founder, CEO, and Editor-In-Chief, PProvoke Media

Reputation In The World Of Hard Power

There is no question that many of those who hold power around the world today believe that brute force—what we might call “hard power”—is the most effective way for countries, and perhaps even companies, to achieve their objectives.

The deployment of hard power has obvious attraction. It communicates the traditional, masculine idea of strength, it promises that those who wield it effectively can triumph over their enemies, their competitors, their opponents in a way that overpowers and even humiliates them.

And so we have seen the great powers—Russia in Ukraine and more recently America in the Gulf—using hard power to achieve their geopolitical goals, and also deploying that power domestically to crush any opposition. More troubling, we have seen large companies—most notably in the technology sector—deploying their own hard power to enforce their will on communities, citizens, and even consumers.

This is clearly a reality that we as communicators need to understand, even if we choose not to deploy hard power ourselves, because geopolitics, tariffs, and technologies are having an impact on our organizations—and our consent is largely irrelevant.

And yet we are already seeing the limits of brute force, whether it is deployed by nation states (the humiliating defeat of the US in Iran) or companies (the growing pushback against AI data centers and the growing influence of democratic socialists in American politics).

I have been a believer in soft power ever since I read Joseph Nye’s book on the topic two decades ago. Indeed, as I read “Soft Power” I came quickly to understand that Nye was writing about things that public relations professionals have always understood and sought to leverage:

- The power of persuasion not to overpower but to align
- The belief in mutually beneficial approaches rather than unilateral dominance
- The ways in which values can build reputations and relationships
- The power of culture—including pop culture—to build connections
- And the notion that success is earned, not demanded or bought

to choose hard or soft power as their approach to dealing with the world. That is a false dichotomy, and a brief survey of history demonstrates that the two can work together to great effect: America did not abandon its military dominance just because its entertainment products gave it immense influence around the world.

And this is equally true in the corporate world.

There will always be those who argue for the use of “hard power” in the corporate context. One could argue that this is the default position of most legal counsel, for example. It is certainly the dominant instinct among chief financial officers, and arguably among CEOs too, since they often get to the top of the corporate pyramid by hoarding as much “hard power” as possible.

So perhaps part of the role of senior communications and public relations professionals is to provide a balancing effect, to remind others in the C-suite that “soft power” can achieve the same results, often at a lower cost (both financially, and in terms of alienating certain stakeholders).

Companies will not build sustainable, long-term success by dominating those upon whom they depend. Companies will benefit more by building mutually-rewarding, win-win relationships with their employees, their customers, their consumers and their investors. This is a critical role for communicators, regardless of what is taking place in the wider world.

This is not to suggest that companies—or even countries—need

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Vineet Handa
Founder & CEO, Kaizzen

From Stakeholder Management to Geopolitical Intelligence: The New Reputation Playbook

Reputation matters.

Does it?

For decades, communications professionals have built strategies around that one unwavering belief. Trust was hard-earned, reputation was fragile, and public perception often determined success or failure.

But if we honestly reflect on the past year, the picture becomes more complicated.

We have witnessed conflicts that have drawn global criticism without altering the course of those involved. We have seen corporations emerge from governance controversies with little visible impact on their financial performance. Leaders have survived public scrutiny that, not long ago, would have been career-ending.

So perhaps the question today is not whether reputation matters.

It is whether reputation matters equally.

Increasingly, the answer appears to be no.

We are entering an era where there is a visible divide. On one side are organisations and institutions that continue to treat reputation as a strategic asset—something that attracts customers, talent, investors and long-term goodwill. On the other are those willing to absorb reputational costs in pursuit of commercial, political or strategic objectives.

The calculation has shifted.

The Bottom Line Has Changed

Reputation and the bottom line are no longer moving in perfect alignment.

In many cases, organisations have discovered that short-term financial gains, market dominance or strategic advantage can outweigh reputational setbacks. Public attention moves quickly, news cycles are shorter than ever, and stakeholders often return if the value proposition remains compelling.

It means its consequences have become uneven.

Yet the same period has also witnessed an increasing focus on governance, ethics and compliance.

The EY Global Integrity Report 2024 found that nearly one in five organisations experienced a significant integrity incident in the previous two years. More concerning, **38% of respondents admitted they would consider behaving unethically to improve their career prospects.**

Recent findings from GlobeScan's 2026 global trust research paint an even starker picture. Trust is declining across governments, NGOs, science, academia and business, reflecting growing public scepticism towards institutions.

India mirrors these trends. Reputation is no longer judged only by communication; increasingly, it is audited through governance.

The Few Who Still Build Reputation

Some organisations still understand that trust is built over years but can disappear overnight.

These organisations have become the genuine flag bearers of reputation.

Unfortunately, they are becoming fewer.

A New Playbook for Communicators

This environment demands a different role for communications leaders.

Managing stakeholders is no longer sufficient.

Communicators must understand geopolitics, regulation, supply chains, technology, investor expectations and societal shifts. Reputation is increasingly influenced by boardroom decisions, geopolitical developments and corporate conduct.

Artificial Intelligence will undoubtedly change how information is created, distributed and discovered.

Yet three principles remain remarkably constant.

First, be right.

The strongest reputation strategy is integrity. Organisations that consistently make the right decisions have far less to fear from AI or misinformation because facts remain their strongest defence.

Second, speak about the good you do.

For years, many believed that doing good quietly was the nobler approach. Today, silence can create an information vacuum that others are happy to fill. Responsible organisations must communicate their impact. If you do not tell your story, someone else will tell it for you.

Third, build credibility through credible voices.

Reputation cannot rely solely on self-published content. Independent media, institutions, analysts, customers and employees continue to shape public confidence.

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The Future of Reputation

Reputation has not lost its importance.

Some actors can withstand reputational damage because they possess strategic leverage. Others cannot. But that should not tempt organisations into believing reputation is expendable.

Ultimately, reputation is still the most enduring form of capital.

The organisations that continue to invest in governance, integrity and transparency will be the ones that outlast news cycles, algorithms and geopolitical uncertainty.

In a world increasingly shaped by hard power, perhaps the greatest competitive advantage still comes from something deceptively simple: **being right, communicating it well and earning the credibility for others to believe it.**



Shetanshu Dikshit

Lead Digital Communications, Pernod Ricard India

The New Power Play: Digital Reputation *The Real Architect of Today's Trust*

In today's interconnected world, reputation has become one of the most valuable strategic assets an organization can possess. While hard power continues to shape markets through economic strength, regulatory influence, and technological capabilities, it is increasingly digital trust that determines how organizations are perceived, remembered, and chosen.

The digital ecosystem has fundamentally changed the rules of reputation. A company's story is no longer defined by corporate announcements or annual reports alone. It is shaped every day through search results, employee voices, customer conversations, media narratives, and countless interactions across digital platforms. In many ways, reputation is no longer what organizations say about themselves, it is what the digital world collectively says about them.

For communication leaders, this represents a profound shift. Our role has evolved beyond managing channels or publishing content. We are now custodians of credibility in an environment where information travels instantly, opinions form within minutes, and trust can take years to build but moments to lose.

Artificial Intelligence has further accelerated this reality. While AI has transformed how content is created and distributed, it has also made authenticity more valuable than ever. As the volume of digital content grows exponentially, audiences are becoming increasingly discerning. They are looking for transparency over perfection, substance over slogans, and purpose over performance. Technology can amplify a message, but only authenticity can sustain trust.

Equally important is the rise of employee advocacy. Employees today are among the most credible voices an organization has. Their experiences, stories, and everyday interactions shape public perception far more powerfully than polished campaigns. Organizations that empower employees to become authentic storytellers build reputations that feel genuine rather than manufactured.

Digital intelligence is also redefining how organizations protect their reputation. Social listening, predictive analytics, and real-time insights enable communicators to understand emerging conversations before they become crises. Reputation management is no longer reactive; it is increasingly about anticipation, preparedness, and continuous engagement. The objective is not simply to respond faster, but to build resilience by listening more closely and acting more thoughtfully.

This becomes particularly important in a world where stakeholders expect organizations to communicate consistently across every touchpoint. Sustainability, ethics, compliance, and social responsibility cannot remain annual reports or campaign themes. They must be reflected in everyday digital behaviour, leadership communication, and employee experiences. Trust is built when actions and communication remain aligned over time.

Looking ahead, the organizations that will lead are not necessarily those with the loudest voices, but those with the clearest values. They will embrace AI without losing empathy, leverage data without compromising integrity, and pursue innovation while remaining deeply human in their communication.

In a world increasingly defined by hard power, digital reputation has emerged as an enduring form of influence. It is earned through consistency, transparency, and meaningful engagement, not through visibility alone. As communicators, our greatest responsibility is not simply to shape narratives but to strengthen trust. Because in the digital age, reputation is no longer a reflection of communication; it is a reflection of character, amplified at the speed of technology.

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Bhavna Jagtiani
CEO, Edelman India

From Trust Building to Trust Bridging

India has always been a trusting nation, standing out as a high-trust society in a world where institutions

are often met with suspicion. Over the years, the Edelman Trust Barometer has placed India firmly in the trusted category, with trust in government, business, employers, and most industry sectors remaining strong.

Yet the story is becoming more nuanced. While India has a trust advantage, it is not evenly distributed. According to the findings of the 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer – India report, there is a 16-point trust gap between higher-income and lower-income groups, reminding us that trust is shaped not only by belief, but by lived experience. People's interactions with government, media, business, and civil society can look vastly different depending on where they sit within the socioeconomic spectrum.

This matters because trust itself is changing. Several factors – geopolitical tensions, economic volatility, misinformation, technological disruption, and social polarisation – are reshaping how people decide who they should trust. And this trust is becoming narrower, more conditional, and selective. In times of uncertainty, people often seek all that is familiar: their communities, identities, information sources, employers, and people who see the world as they do. This is trust amid insularity.

In India, trust is becoming more local and more relationship based, with nearly one in two respondents showing insular trust mindset. People are reposing greater trust in those closest to them: their employer, CEO, colleagues, neighbours, partners, and community leaders. Trust has emerged as one of the most valuable forms of equity for organisations globally. In a fragmented world, stakeholders are seeking competence, consistency, transparency, and ethical leadership and want organisations that provide stability amid uncertainty.

This changes the communications model for organisations. Trust can no longer be built only through national platforms, corporate channels, or top-down messaging. Organisations need to demonstrate that they can act responsibly when the external environment feels volatile. It must be built from the inside out, relationship by relationship.

This is where leadership becomes decisive. If the challenge today is fragmented trust, then leaders must move beyond earning trust from those who already support them and actively bridge trust with those who are different or stand opposed.

Trust bridging is the response to rising insularity. By definition, it is the ability to foster trust across difference by listening, acknowledging divergent realities, and helping groups find common interests. It is more about creating the conditions in which people who disagree can still work together, not about asking people to abandon their views.

People value organisations that encourage cooperation across divides, or those that take positions consistent with their stated values. This creates a new mandate for CEOs: to consult people with different values and backgrounds, engage constructively with critics, and show through action that they are worthy of trust. The workplace may be the most practical place to scale this change. Employers have the benefit of daily interactions, shared goals and organisational infrastructure needed to help people engage constructively across difference. Inculcating a shared sense of identity with dialogue training within diverse teams can transform trust bridging from an idea into lived practice.

The defining challenge of this decade is not a lack of trust, but the fragmentation of it. India's trust advantage cannot be taken for granted. The leaders who will shape the future will be those who turn trust from a defensive asset into a bridging force, expanding it across divides to build resilience, legitimacy, and progress.

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Nitin Mantri

President, APAC, We. Communications, and
Group CEO, Avian We.

Reputation Is Now A Test Of Judgement

For a long time, reputation was treated as an outcome of communication. What an organisation said, how consistently it said it, and how widely the message travelled shaped how it was seen.

That logic is no longer enough.

In a world of hard power, reputation is shaped less by messaging and more by judgement. It is tested in the choices an organisation makes when power, policy, public scrutiny and business interest collide. So, the question is no longer simply: what's the story? It is: what sits behind the story?

Hard power has changed the conditions under which organisations operate. Policy decisions move markets; geopolitical tensions reshape supply chains; technology creates influence at speed and scale; and public opinion forms before institutions have fully understood the facts. AI now adds another layer to this complexity. In recent We. Communications and USC Annenberg research, 64% of communicators said reputational damage from AI is a serious risk, while 30% said their organisation had already experienced reputation issues due to AI-generated content.

In this environment, reputation cannot sit above the business as a communications exercise. It has to be understood as a result of how the business thinks, decides and behaves.

This requires a shift in how leaders view reputation.

The first shift is from messaging to consequence. Communication still matters, but it cannot compensate for poor judgement. A weak decision explained well remains a weak decision. A responsible decision explained poorly may still create avoidable risk. Communication, therefore, should not come in only after a decision has been made. It should be embedded in the system that improves judgement before choices become consequences.

The second shift is from visibility to discernment. The instinct in a high-pressure environment is often to respond quickly, occupy the space and control the narrative. But not every issue requires a louder voice. Some moments demand clarity, humility and restraint. Reputation is built as much by knowing when not to speak as by knowing what to say.

The third shift is from stakeholder management to stakeholder understanding. Organisations often map stakeholders by

influence, interest or proximity. That is useful, but not enough. In a fractured environment, stakeholders do not respond only to information. They respond to fairness, intent, consistency and perceived respect. The same decision can be read very differently by regulators, employees, investors, communities and consumers. Judgement lies in understanding those differences before they become conflict.

This is why reputation has become a leadership discipline, not a communications function alone. It sits at the intersection of strategy, risk, policy, culture and conduct. Leaders, therefore, need to look beyond the immediate benefit of a decision and consider what follows: the precedent created, the expectations raised, the stakeholders affected and the trust strengthened or weakened.

In calmer times, reputation could be built through visibility. That now feels like a luxury from another era. Today, reputation is built through steadiness: consistency under pressure, clarity in difficult moments, and the maturity to choose what is right over what is merely convenient.

The organisations that will earn trust in this environment will not be those with the most polished narratives. They will be those with the clearest judgement.

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Deepshikha Dharmaraj

CEO, Burson Group India

As Hard Power Reshapes The World, Reputation Is The Only Currency That Holds

Business leaders today are operating in a world increasingly shaped by hard power. Geopolitical tensions, protectionism, trade restrictions, technology controls, regulatory intervention and the rapid rise of artificial intelligence are changing the rules of competition. As uncertainty becomes a defining feature of the business landscape, organisations are under growing pressure to remain resilient while continuing to create value.

The challenge is that most of these forces sit outside a company's control. Leaders cannot influence geopolitical conflict, rewrite trade policy or eliminate economic volatility. What they can influence is how stakeholders perceive and support their organisation as these forces unfold.

That is why reputation has become one of the most important strategic assets a business can possess.

Reputation: The strategic advantage

For many years, reputation was viewed as a soft measure of success—important, but difficult to quantify. Today, the evidence points to a very different reality. Research from Burson shows that organisations can generate nearly five percent in unexpected and additional annual shareholder returns through strong reputation. This is the “Reputation Return” – a quantifiable financial return that reputation contributes directly to business outcomes. Among the companies studied, the financial impact varied widely with Reputation Return ranging from \$2 million to as much as \$202 billion, depending on market capitalisation and reputational strength. Increasingly, reputation is being viewed not as a by-product of business performance, but as a form of capital that creates tangible economic value.

In a world defined by hard power, reputation serves another critical purpose: resilience.

A strong reputation creates what might be described as a reservoir of goodwill. It helps organisations navigate uncertainty, gain stakeholder support during periods of change and recover more quickly when challenges arise. Conversely, organisations with a weak reputation often find that even relatively minor issues can escalate into significant business risks. Reputation will not remove external pressures, but it can influence how customers, employees, investors, regulators and communities respond when those pressures emerge.

The question for leaders is therefore not whether reputation matters, but how to earn it, protect it and strengthen it.

The eight pillars of reputation

Burson's Reputation Capital model identifies eight interconnected pillars that shape stakeholder perceptions and determine an organisation's reputation strength. These pillars extend well beyond communications and encompass every part of the business. They include financial strength and performance, products and services, innovation and future readiness, citizenship and social responsibility, employer behaviour and workplace culture, corporate integrity and governance, management and leadership, and creativity and ingenuity. Together, they represent the dimensions through which stakeholders evaluate whether an organisation is credible, capable and worthy of support.

Importantly, organisations do not need to excel equally across every pillar at all times. The most effective leaders understand where their reputation is strongest and where it is most vulnerable. They identify the areas that matter most to stakeholders and focus their efforts accordingly.

Building reputation with intent

For some organisations, the priority may be strengthening governance and accountability. For others, it may be improving employee experience, demonstrating societal impact or building confidence in innovation. The critical step is understanding which of the eight pillars is most exposed and addressing it with the same discipline applied to any other strategic business asset.

As hard power continues to reshape the global environment, the organisations that thrive will not necessarily be those that can control external events. They will be those that have built sufficient credibility and confidence to navigate them successfully.

In an era of growing uncertainty, reputation remains one of the few assets leaders can actively strengthen. It creates value, protects value and sustains value over time. More importantly, it provides businesses with something increasingly rare in today's world: resilience in the face of forces they cannot control.

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Swati Khandelwal

Senior Vice President & Head – Group Corporate Communications, Mahindra Group

Power, Trust, And The Changing Global Order

In an increasingly complex and contested global environment, the idea of power is undergoing a subtle but significant shift. Traditionally, power has been defined by tangible assets – military strength, economic dominance, and geopolitical leverage. This “hard power” continues to shape global dynamics, influencing decisions, alliances, and conflicts. Yet, alongside it, another force has been steadily gaining importance: reputation.

Reputation, once considered an intangible or secondary asset, is now emerging as a critical amplifier – or limiter – of hard power. In a world where information travels instantly and narratives shape perception, how nations, institutions, and corporations are perceived can materially influence their ability to exercise power.

At its core, reputation is about trust. It is built over time through consistent actions, transparency, and the ability to deliver on promises. In the realm of hard power, trust becomes a multiplier. A nation with strong military capabilities but a weak or inconsistent reputation may find its influence constrained. Allies may hesitate, partnerships may weaken, and even deterrence may lose credibility. Conversely, a country or institution with a strong reputation for reliability, fairness, and stability often finds its hard power more effective and widely accepted.

This interplay is particularly evident in global geopolitics today. Strategic alliances are no longer driven solely by capability but also by credibility. Nations are increasingly evaluated not just on what they can do, but on how they are perceived to behave. Reputation shapes diplomatic capital. It influences negotiations, trade relationships, and multilateral cooperation.

The same principle applies in the corporate world. Large organizations operate in environments that mirror geopolitical complexity – competing interests, regulatory scrutiny, and stakeholder expectations. Here too, hard power exists in the form of capital, scale, and market dominance. However, reputation determines how effectively these assets can be deployed.

A company with significant financial strength but a fragile reputation may struggle to expand, attract talent, or build enduring partnerships. On the other hand, organizations that invest in building a strong reputation – through governance, ethical conduct, and social responsibility – often find themselves better positioned to navigate uncertainty and seize opportunities.

In today's interconnected world, reputation is also more vulnerable than ever. Digital platforms and real-time communication mean that missteps can quickly escalate into crises. This has raised the stakes for leaders, who must now manage not only strategy and execution, but also narrative and perception.

Importantly, reputation cannot be manufactured overnight. It is the cumulative outcome of decisions, behaviours, and values demonstrated over time. In the context of hard power, this means that reputation must be embedded into the core of strategy rather than treated as an afterthought.

There is also a growing recognition that reputation and purpose are closely linked. Stakeholders – whether citizens, consumers, or investors – are increasingly aligning with entities that demonstrate a broader sense of responsibility. This alignment enhances legitimacy, which in turn strengthens the ability to exercise power effectively.

Looking ahead, the convergence of hard power and reputation will only deepen. As global challenges become more interconnected – ranging from climate change to technological disruption – the need for collaboration will grow. In such a world, the ability to influence outcomes will depend not just on strength, but on standing.

Reputation, therefore, is no longer a soft adjunct to hard power. It is a strategic asset in its own right – one that shapes influence, enables trust, and ultimately determines the effectiveness of power in a rapidly evolving world.

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Shivaram Lakshminarayan
Managing Director, Ruder Finn India

Reputation Is No Longer a Soft Asset

Throughout my career, the conversation about reputation has evolved significantly. Rather than controlling corporate narratives, communication firms now navigate a real-time ecosystem influenced by rapidly spreading content and collective accountability from the public. Today, reputation isn't something you construct; it's an enduring, AI auditable digital footprint where public sentiment can swiftly change from admiration to a complete boycott.

I'm not sure exactly when that changed. But it has, and quite fundamentally.

What I see across boardrooms today is that reputation isn't trailing the business anymore. It's walking ahead of it. It determines whether a regulator extends the benefit of the doubt, whether a potential partner takes the meeting, whether talent even considers you. The shift from reputation as outcome to reputation as prerequisite — that's the thing leadership teams need to sit with.

The world hasn't made this easier. Geopolitical tension has changed the context in which organisations operate, well beyond trade flows and supply chains. Who you do business with, where you're present, what you stay silent on — all of it is being read through lenses that simply didn't exist five years ago. Decisions that once felt routine now carry reputational weight they didn't before.

Let's not forget our new favourite tech: Artificial intelligence. AI has added a new level of complexity. How people find information has changed. What they encounter first and what shapes their initial impression of you is increasingly generated by systems that lack a brief and an obligation to be fair. A narrative about your organisation can form and travel well before you've had a chance to respond. Most leadership teams haven't fully grasped how different this is from the media environment they grew up managing.

For many communicators, AI has changed reputation management from media relations to algorithmic warfare. AI has eliminated response time and weaponised the digital ecosystem with automated deepfakes, synthetic misinformation, and coordinated bot campaigns that can create crises. Traditional search visibility is replaced by AI-driven gatekeepers like LLMs and conversational bots that quickly analyse a brand's history. In this new paradigm, PR professionals manage algorithms that dictate sentiment, shifting towards predictive data auditing, synthetic media defence, and optimising brand narratives for machine learning.

A few months ago, I was in a room with a leadership team getting ready for a significant stakeholder engagement. The question that stopped the conversation wasn't about messaging. It came from someone who simply asked: "Do we actually believe what we're about to say? And will they?"

That's where communications lives now. The organisations handling this well have done something simple but genuinely hard. They've stopped treating communications as the last step — the polish that happens after decisions are made. They pull it in earlier, not to craft a better announcement, but to ask whether that announcement would survive a sceptical audience or a journalist who has done their homework. The question isn't just "what do we say?" It's "is this actually defensible?"

Organisations that communicate clearly, act consistently, and remain transparent even when it is uncomfortable build the kind of trust that doesn't need to be constantly defended. That kind of earned credibility cannot be manufactured quickly or replicated easily.

For decades, organisations treated reputation as a consequence of performance. That's changed. In a world shaped by hard power, reputation is no longer a soft asset sitting alongside the business. It is part of the business itself.

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Danish Malik
CEO & Founder, Boomlet

The Strategic Value Of Reputation In An Age Of Hard Power

For decades, the study of hard power revolved around military capability, economic leverage and diplomatic alliances. Nations built deterrence through weapons, trade and strategic partnerships because influence was largely determined by the ability to project force. That assumption no longer holds entirely true. In an interconnected digital ecosystem, reputation has emerged as an equally consequential instrument of power.

Modern conflicts are increasingly fought on two fronts. One is territorial, where armies confront each other. The other is perceptual, where competing narratives seek to establish legitimacy before global audiences. Victory on the battlefield can be undermined by defeat in the information ecosystem, making reputation not merely a communications concern but a strategic asset.

This shift extends well beyond geopolitics. Governments, corporations and institutions now operate in an environment where public perception travels faster than policy, and algorithms often amplify emotion ahead of evidence.

Boomlet's recent report, *The Digital Battlefield: How Memes, Music and AI Are Winning the US-Iran War*, illustrates this transformation. Analysing more than **22.8 million online conversations**, the study found that the conflict was shaped as much by memes, AI generated content, music and creator ecosystems as by military developments themselves. Nearly **72 per cent of digital conversations carried negative sentiment**, with anger emerging as the dominant emotional driver, demonstrating that emotional resonance, rather than factual accuracy, increasingly determines the reach of a narrative.

The report also highlights a deeper strategic lesson. A militarily weaker actor can significantly influence international opinion by mastering digital storytelling. Artificial intelligence has reduced the cost of producing persuasive content to almost zero, while social platforms reward speed, relatability and emotion over institutional credibility. The implications extend beyond warfare. The same dynamics now shape elections, corporate crises, public policy debates and regulatory discourse.

A similar pattern emerged in Boomlet's analysis of the Zomato delivery partner strike. What began as an operational disruption quickly evolved into a national conversation around labour rights, social security and platform governance. Influencers, policymakers and

mainstream media transformed a corporate issue into a public policy debate. Yet the recovery did not begin with conventional crisis communication. It began when the conversation itself was reframed. Founder led long form communication, supported by a coordinated digital ecosystem, shifted public attention from allegations of exploitation towards governance, leadership and structural reform, significantly reducing narrative volatility within days.

The contrast between these two case studies is striking. One concerns geopolitical conflict and the other a corporate labour dispute. Yet both demonstrate the same principle. Reputation is no longer determined solely by what happens. It is determined by how events are interpreted, amplified and sustained across interconnected digital networks.

This has profound implications for leadership. Boards have traditionally invested in cybersecurity, compliance and financial risk because these were recognised as enterprise risks. Reputation deserves similar treatment. In a world where misinformation, synthetic media and coordinated influence campaigns can alter stakeholder behaviour within hours, reputation management can no longer remain confined to corporate communications teams. It requires intelligence capabilities, continuous monitoring, advocacy networks and leadership that can engage with credibility before narratives become entrenched.

The future will not belong to organisations that simply communicate more frequently. It will belong to those that understand reputation as strategic infrastructure, deserving the same investment and preparedness as any other critical business function.

Hard power will continue to shape geopolitical outcomes. However, reputation increasingly determines legitimacy, and legitimacy ultimately sustains influence. In the digital age, the decisive contest is no longer only over territory or market share. It is over trust. Those who recognise this shift early will be better positioned to navigate both geopolitical uncertainty and corporate volatility in the years ahead.

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Shaily Vaswani

Senior Vice President, Group Communication & Brand
Aditya Birla Group

Why Reputation Matters in a World of Hard Power

One thing I've noticed over the last few years is that the nature of business conversations has changed.

The agenda in boardrooms still revolves around growth, customers, competition and investments. But alongside these familiar conversations are topics that, until a few years ago, didn't demand the same level of attention. Geopolitics, supply chains, technology restrictions, tariffs and changing government policies have all become part of everyday business discussions.

It's not that geopolitics is new to business. It never was. Businesses have always had to factor global developments into their decisions. What's changed is the pace at which the world is changing. Assumptions that once held good for years can now change in a matter of months, sometimes even weeks. That makes decision-making far more complex than it used to be.

What I find interesting is how this has also changed the way organisations think about reputation. Take something as routine as deciding where to set up the next manufacturing plant or whether it's time to reduce dependence on a particular supplier. These are business decisions. They always have been. But today, they are also viewed through very different lenses. Employees look for signs of stability. Investors look for confidence in the business. Customers expect organisations to live by the values they talk about. The decision may be the same, but the way people respond to it has changed.

That's probably why communication finds itself in a different place today.

There was a time when communication came into the picture after a decision had been made. The job was to explain it well. Increasingly, communication is being brought into the conversation much earlier. Not because organisations need better messaging, but because they need someone to look at a decision from the outside in. The conversation is no longer just about the decision itself. It's also about how employees, customers and investors are likely to see it, and whether it is consistent with what the organisation has always stood for.

Those conversations don't always change the decision. But they often improve it.

Over the years, I've also come to believe that the term "reputation management" doesn't quite capture what reputation really is. Communication can help people understand a decision. It can provide context when things are uncertain. It can reinforce trust that has been built over time. But it cannot create trust on its own.

Trust grows in much quieter moments.

It grows through the decisions organisations make when there isn't a spotlight on them. It grows through the way leaders respond when things don't go according to plan. It grows when people see consistency between what an organisation says and what it actually does. None of these moments may make headlines. Together, they shape reputation.

For communication professionals, that's perhaps the biggest change. Our role is no longer limited to helping organisations communicate decisions. We also have an opportunity to help them think through those decisions from the perspective of the people they affect. Sometimes, asking a different question at the right time can be just as valuable as finding the right words later.

The world isn't going to become any less uncertain. Businesses will continue to deal with changing policies, geopolitical developments and new challenges that none of us can fully predict. While organisations may not have control over those events, they do have control over how they respond. Over time, those responses shape the confidence people place in them. And that's really how reputation is built.

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Nandita Lakshmanan

Founder & CEO, The PRactice, National Chair,
Growth and Industry Standardisation, PRCAI



Rishi Seth

Investor and Managing Partner, The PRactice

A Case For Quiet Strength

There was a period, not so long ago, when nations worked as hard to be admired as they now work to be feared

An ordinary childhood in India, in the 1980's might include an Indian classical dance recital one month, a Soviet folk troupe the next, then a French cultural evening or a season of international film festivals, each arriving under the auspices of government cultural organisations. India's own instrument was the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, but it was hardly unique. Comparable institutions existed across Europe, Asia and the Americas, each convinced a nation's character was expressed as much through its artists as its diplomats; that influence earned through admiration tends to outlast influence secured through coercion.

Reputation, properly understood, is rarely the product of communication alone. It is the residue left behind once people, institutions, businesses or nations have encountered one another honestly enough to stop performing for each other. Communication can accelerate that process, but it was never a substitute for it.

For much of the post-Cold War period, this distinction seemed almost academic. Soft power appeared ascendant, globalisation rewarded openness, and institutions spoke confidently of shared values and interconnected markets. Reputation flourished in a climate where credibility and consistency mattered nearly as much as military or economic strength.

That assumption no longer holds. Hard power has returned, not only in the familiar language of borders, tariffs and military capability, but as a broader instinct towards control. Public debate has narrowed in places once considered settled, institutions built to hold power accountable face growing pressure, and certainty is rewarded more readily than complexity. Societies are more connected than at any point in history, and yet increasingly fragmented into separate realities, each reinforced by its own information ecosystem. This is not a claim about any one government or ideology. It is a shift in the conditions every institution, public or private, now has to operate inside.

For business, the implications are profound. When power becomes more transactional, reputation becomes more consequential. Employees, customers, investors and communities are no longer judging organisations by the precision of their messaging alone. They are watching for consistency between what an organisation says, what it does, and what it keeps doing once circumstances turn inconvenient. Conviction cannot be seen as a carefully crafted statement but in a decision that carries a cost.

That has always demanded courage, and demands considerably more of it now. India offers an enduring template. Jamsetji Tata held no public office and sought none, yet the institutions he founded continue to shape India's economic and social life more than a century later. They were expressions of a belief about what India could become, built with generations yet unborn, in mind. Their reputation did not emerge from communication. It emerged from sustained conviction, renewed over time, through action.

Perhaps that is where Public Relations finds its most enduring purpose, not managing narratives, useful as that phrase is, but building the kind of reputation no narrative can substitute for, earned through behaviour repeated often enough that others come to believe it reflects something fundamental rather than something performed.

As hard power reasserts itself across geopolitics, business and public life, the pressure to optimise for the immediate, to respond faster, speak louder, control more tightly, will only grow. Those instincts may win attention, but rarely earn trust. Reputation earns belief, and belief, once earned, is very often the one form of influence that outlasts power itself.

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Atul Sharma

CEO, Value 360 Communications Ltd

The Advent Of AI Has Brought Back PR's Most Important Metric

As AI becomes a new gateway to information, communications leaders must revisit a metric that has shaped media strategy for decades

For decades, public relations has been governed by a simple belief: bigger publications create bigger reputations. Campaigns were planned around circulation, impressions and share of voice. A front-page story in a national daily was considered the ultimate measure of success, while specialist publications often played a supporting role.

Today, that equation is changing. Information is increasingly being discovered, interpreted and recommended by AI. As Large Language Models (LLMs) become part of how customers, investors and professionals research brands, communications strategies must evolve alongside them.

The question for communications leaders is no longer just "How many people saw our story?" It is increasingly "Will our story shape how AI understands our brand?"

Reach Built Awareness But Authority Builds Retrieval

Historically, PR has optimised for distribution. The objective was to place stories in publications with the widest possible audience because distribution determined influence.

LLMs are introducing a different equation.

Unlike people, AI models do not consume news based on familiarity, circulation or brand recall. They synthesise information from multiple sources, identifying patterns, corroborating information and drawing heavily from credible editorial content. Recent research analysing more than 25 million AI citations across ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude found that earned media accounted for 84% of cited sources, while paid and advertorial content represented just 0.3%. This doesn't diminish the role of national media, though. A story in a leading daily continues to shape public opinion, influence stakeholders and create visibility at scale. But visibility and authority are no longer identical outcomes.

One creates attention. The other builds lasting credibility.

Relevance Is Becoming the New Competitive Advantage

For an automotive brand, a feature in a national newspaper would have been considered the ultimate communications win. Today, sustained editorial presence across respected automotive publications can create a stronger body of topical authority than a single high-profile headline. The same principle applies across industries.

For startups, Inc42 has become a trusted voice on entrepreneurship. EHealthworld shapes healthcare policy. Exchange4Media remains an authority in marketing. These publications may not always command the largest readership. What they command is contextual credibility. That's why I'd put the strategic value of earned media at two to three times what it was. Every credible editorial mention now serves two audiences simultaneously. It influences the people reading it today while strengthening the body of trusted information that AI systems may retrieve tomorrow.

Not all earned media creates this advantage. A dozen disconnected stories across unrelated publications rarely build lasting authority. Consistent visibility within the publications that define your sector does. Relevance has beaten reach.

The Communications Playbook Needs Rewriting

Media lists have traditionally been built around circulation and audience size. Going forward, they must also reflect authority and topical relevance.

Every sector has a small group of publications that shape informed opinion. Communications teams should identify the ones that consistently influence their industry's conversations and invest in owning that space through sustained thought leadership and executive commentary. Consistency matters more than isolated visibility, because authority compounds over time.

This also means rethinking trade media. Long treated as secondary to mainstream coverage, specialist publications are now repositories of expertise that shape AI results. Trade PR isn't a supporting tactic anymore; it's a pillar of long-term reputation strategy.

The Next Decade of PR Will Reward Credibility

Every technological shift forces our profession to revisit its assumptions. The mobile internet changed how content was consumed. LLMs are changing how reputation is retrieved.

In a hard power world, influence has become increasingly concentrated and so has AI's trust. It does not distribute attention equally. It gravitates towards depth, consistency and domain credibility. The brands that succeed in this new communications environment will not necessarily be the ones that dominate every headline. They will be the ones who consistently earn credibility in the publications that define their industries. That is not a smaller ambition. It is a smarter one.

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Shashikant Someshwar
CEO, Weber Shandwick India

When Hard Power Returns, Words Carry More Weight

When conflict escalated in West Asia, the world felt it immediately. Oil prices jumped past \$100 a barrel, shipping lanes slowed down, and financial markets went wild. In India, everything from gold prices to daily groceries felt the whiplash.

None of this was driven by a boardroom decision, yet the fallout landed squarely on the CEO's desk. Today, corporate leaders are navigating an era where rapid geopolitical volatility collides with the structural disruption of AI.

As Oxford Economics notes, risks now escalate faster than traditional planning cycles allow. This means strategic communications must inform decisions before they are finalized, not after.

During a crisis, the default executive reflex used to be a broad, reassuring statement. Today, that approach falls short. In a complex environment of fluctuating costs and rerouted supply chains, stakeholders immediately spot this disconnect. Employees require clear confirmation of business stability, investors need assurance that the core strategy remains intact, and partners expect absolute clarity on the company's position.

The strategy to navigate this is saying more, not less

Keeping the lines of communication open does not require a leader to have every answer. It simply requires them to explain their thinking, not just their decisions. That depth is what builds genuine trust.

Of course, "saying more" does not mean speaking constantly or reacting to every headline. In practice, the most strategic advice a communications team can give is simply: not yet, or not at all.

True transparency requires discipline. It means communications leaders advising on tone, timing, and audience as events unfold, rather than rushing out a superficial statement that amplifies chaos. It means aligning PR, advocacy, and marketing so the company speaks with one consistent voice. This demand for agility is exactly why at Omnicom we are forming specialized micro-networks—allowing us to collaborate and respond swiftly, bypassing the friction of a traditional generalist setup.

Then there is the AI factor. Its most critical role in this landscape isn't flashy. It is pragmatic: continuously monitoring real-time sentiment shifts, identifying emerging risks before they become headlines, and accelerating initial drafting so teams aren't starting from scratch under pressure.

The industry has firmly shifted from AI panic to pragmatic optimism. As OPRG CEO Chris Foster and Mastercard's Raja Rajamannar recently highlighted, teams are actively leveraging AI for growth while simultaneously developing governance to counter threats like deepfakes.

The upside is tangible: communicators get more time to strategize and execute. But speed can make messaging sound generic if left unchecked. The organizations getting this right treat AI as a tool that clears the runway for human judgment.

Ultimately, technology can process the data, but only leadership can provide the context. As businesses face these twin disruptors, the Chief Communications Officer has definitively transitioned from a custodian of the message into an enterprise-wide strategist.

When it matters most, transparency is not the risk. Evasive silence is.

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Sayantani Roy

Chief Strategy Officer, PR Pundit Havas Red

The Age Of Geopolitical Reputation

Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 just as the world was recovering from COVID, the world has experienced an unprecedented surge in global conflicts bringing upon us the age of *hard power*. In the past for almost three decades, reputation management operated in a world characterized by globalization, economic interdependence, meaningful knowledge exchanges and conscious capitalism as opposed to deploying coercive tactics. However, the present reality is vastly different that has brought **geopoliticalization of corporate reputation** in front & center of image management.

Companies are increasingly being judged on supply chain decisions, data & cybersecurity, AI governance, market-entry and exit decisions, stance on geopolitical issues rather than only products, performance, ESG and citizenship. Historically good reputation meant stronger sales, easier hiring, great quality, investor confidence but today good reputation amounts to regulatory trust, market access, government confidence, partnership eligibility, resilience during crises! In a hard-power world Governments themselves have emerged as primary reputation stakeholders. **Government trust may become more important than public affection.**

With war returning to the center of international affairs, trade has become a geopolitical weapon- US China technology restrictions, Strait of Hormuz are some prominent examples. For globally connected sectors such as technology, telecommunications, manufacturing, energy and financial services, a geopolitical reputation increasingly sits alongside corporate reputation. **Looking at it through a chronological lens, Reputation has passed through 3 phases:**

Reputation 1.0 – Product trust – companies were judged on quality, reliability, service quality. **Reputation 2.0 – Corporate citizenship** – companies were judged on ESG, sustainability, diversity, stakeholder capitalism. **Reputation 3.0 is playing out now – Strategic trust** – companies are being judged on resilience, security, sovereignty, geopolitical choices & national-interest implications. The defining reputation challenge of the coming decade is not managing perception. It is maintaining trust in an environment where power, security and national interest increasingly shape decisions.

Companies such as **TCS, Infosys, Wipro and HCL are no longer evaluated purely on their technology capabilities.** As AI, cybersecurity and cloud infrastructure become matters of strategic importance, governments and clients increasingly assess them on data security practices, sovereign cloud

capabilities, responsible AI positions, cyber resilience etc. **Reliance Jio is not merely a telecom operator, its reputation increasingly encompasses issues such as India's digital sovereignty, national digital infrastructure, data localization etc.** Apple's extensive manufacturing presence in China has created a geopolitical dimension to its reputation with investors especially given tensions between US and Chinese regulatory matters. **Policymakers and media increasingly discuss Apple's geopolitical exposure alongside its business performance.**

Communications professionals increasingly operate in a world where the goal is not always a seal of approval but hovers around maintaining trust amid disagreement. The institutions that endure will be those able to demonstrate not just strength, but legitimacy, consistency and trustworthiness when the pressure is greatest. Many organizations today cannot satisfy all stakeholder constituencies simultaneously. For example – exiting Russia angered some stakeholders but pleased others, staying in China invites criticism from some stakeholders but reassurance from others. **The communications challenge is therefore not consensus-building but legitimacy-building.**

Stakeholders are increasingly looking at where the company operates, what position does it take on global conflicts, how does it balance local obligations against global values & what plan does it have in place for major business disruptions. The Maldives controversy for travel sector impacted balance sheets to an extent. In such scenarios, **communications function increasingly becomes the interpreter between corporate strategy and societal expectations.**

Does reputation become less important when hard power dominates? Pundits opine on the contrary. Reputation is often dismissed as an intangible asset, today it should be viewed as a critical strategic asset. **How much trust can we draw upon when circumstances become difficult should be a dominant thought in every CEO's mind.** On the other hand, in such a scenario greater responsibility defines the communications leader of the future, s/he must understand geopolitics, public policy, risk management, national security implications & so forth. Our tribe will be valued not just for managing narratives, but for helping organizations navigate the intersection of trust, power and legitimacy. In the age of geopolitical reputation, that may be the profession's most important mandate yet!

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- Making the East Shine Again — Puri Rath Yatra 2025 — Coca-Cola India with First Partners
- She Knows the Ground She Stands On — Hindustan Zinc with Archetype

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- Naye Zamane Ka Naya Paint — Birla Opus Paints with Burson Genesis

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- Kurkure Jowar Puffs — The launch that got everyone saying Isse Acha Kya Hoga — PepsiCo - Kurkure with Edelman India
- Royal Enfield Amazing Thailand Ride — Royal Enfield with Blisses Point Communications
- The Legend Returns - New Tata Sierra — Tata Motors with PR Pundit Havas Red

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Persuasive Content

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- From Fringe to Mainstream: Repositioning Plant-Based Nutrition in India's Chronic Disease Narrative — Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) with Adfactors PR
- Karnataka Bike Taxi Ban: Turning a Corner — Rapido with Burson Genesis
- Okta: The Identity Evolution — Okta with 80dB Communications
- Railblazers — Alstom India with Burson Genesis

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Winner:

- Launching In The Dark : How Patron El Alto aligned with a generation in ascent — Bacardi, India with Current Global, The Weber Shandwick Collective

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- ICONIQ White 10 Mn Milestone The World's Fastest-Growing Millionaire Spirits Brand · Built for New India — Allied Blenders and Distillers with Weber Shandwick India
- The Sports Front: India's First Legend Face Off — The Sports Front with Adfactors PR

Digital Marketing/Advertising

Winner:

- From Face to Feed- Turning Cultural Virality into Credible Conversations — L'Oréal Paris with Adfactors PR

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- Fuelling India's Cricket Frenzy with "Deewane India Ka Deewana Humsafar" — Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) with First Partners
- Hilsa Campaign — AWL Agri Business with Adfactors PR

Social Media & Community Management

Social Visual

Winner:

- Every Smile Belongs — Smile Train India with The Practice

Certificate of Excellence

- #LightsOfChange — Gates Foundation India with Organic by MSL
- Celebrating You — Diageo India with Burson Genesis
- Moms are Just Moms — Aditya Birla Group with Makani Creatives
- The E-Waste That We Eat (But Shouldn't) — Appliance business, Godrej Enterprises Group with AdFactors and Tribe Communications

Digital Publishing—includes websites and blogs

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- From Underperforming to Unstoppable — Aviva Life Insurance India with Avian We.

Certificate of Excellence

- Bachpan Manao (Celebrate Childhood) on DailyHunt — EkStep Foundation
- Building PhonePe as India's Trusted Full-Stack Fintech Platform — PhonePe
- From Invisible to Undeniable — Step by Step School with Avian We.
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- #CarefortheRare — MedGenome with GCI Health
- Locally Yours — Reviving India's Grassroots Retail in the Age of Quick Commerce — Coca-Cola India with First Partners
- Making the East Shine Again — Puri Rath Yatra 2025 — Coca-Cola India with First Partners
- New Zealand's Invitation to Travel # Beyond the Filter — Tourism New Zealand with Current Global - The Weber Shandwick Collective, India

Tools and Tactics

Best Use of AI in PR

Winner:

- Hum Raaton Mein Sooraj Ugaate Hain (We bring daylight to the darkest of nights) — Signify with Burson Genesis

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- Aisi Energy Kahin Nahi — HMEL-HPCL Mittal Energy with Adfactors PR
- Drivers Of Safety — HMEL - HPCL Mittal Energy with Adfactors PR

Best Use of VR, AR, Immersive Technology

Winner:

- We Transform Mobility in India - Siemens at IREE 2025 — Siemens

Certificate of Excellence

- 360°VR Film | Divya's Football Journey | A Girl from a Tribal Community — Reliance Foundation

Best AI Tool or Product

Winner:

- Har Ghar Surakshit 2025 – The Accidental Invitation Initiative — Locks & Architectural Solutions, a business of Godrej Enterprises Group with Adfactors PR

Certificate of Excellence

- Smash The Ordinary — Yas Island & PickYourTrail with Concept Public Relations India

Audio: Podcasts + Music

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- From Folk to Feed: How Coke Studio Bharat Turned Regional Songs Into National Listening Moments — Coca-Cola, India with Weber Shandwick, India

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- Steel of India Podcast — Jindal Steel

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- The Flying Canvas — Air India Express
- The strategic communications playbook behind Meesho's IPO success — Meesho Limited with Adfactors PR
- Vote SHE: Activating Bangladesh's Women Voters — Miss Bangladesh US Organization with Hiam Hafizuddin

Data in Campaign Planning and Development

Winner:

- How India Instamarted — India, Decoded Through Its Carts — Instamart with We. Communications

Certificate of Excellence

- Calling It Climate: How India Began to Recognise What It Was Already Experiencing — CEEW, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- Crew — Godrej Properties with Adfactors PR
- From Co-working Confusion to Capital Markets Conviction — WeWork India Management with Adfactors PR
- Making Conversations The New Storefront — WhatsApp, India with Weber Shandwick, India

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SABRE Awards South Asia 2026 Finalists

The 2026 SABRE Awards South Asia shortlist was selected from among more than 600 entries in this year's competition, which recognizes Superior Achievement in Branding, Reputation and Engagement. The campaigns were evaluated by a jury of industry leaders.

The winners will be announced at the SABRE Awards South Asia Awards ceremony on 13 July in Mumbai at The St. Regis Mumbai, as part of PRCAI's PRologue event.

To register and buy a seat for the award night, please email the PRCAI team - tasneem.ali@prcai.org and copy ceo@prcai.org

Diamond SABRE Awards

Corporate CEO of the Year

- Winner will be announced during the awards ceremony

Company of the year

- A Force For Good — Aditya Birla Group
- From Stories to Leadership: Building Reputation the Godrej Way — Godrej Industries Group with GIG Corporate Brand & Communications
- JioStar — JioStar
- Licence to Lead: Repositioning Alcobev Through Influence-Led Communications — Diageo
- Tech Mahindra: The New Growth Code — Tech Mahindra with Kommune Brand Communications

The SABRE Award for Superior Achievement in Brand-Building

- #WinOverWeight (Yurpeak®) — Cipla with GCI Health
- Aisi Energy Kahin Nahi — HMEL-HPCL Mittal Energy Limited with Adfactors PR
- From Face to Feed- Turning Cultural Virality into Credible Conversations — L'Oréal Paris with Adfactors PR
- From Folk to Feed: How Coke Studio Bharat Turned Regional Songs Into National Listening Moments — Coca-Cola, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- JioHotstar - Unlocking Infinite Possibilities for India — JioHotstar

The SABRE Award for Superior Achievement in Reputation Management

- #CelebratingAcceptance — Godrej Industries Group
- Powering India's Frontier Nation Ambition — Microsoft
- She Knows the Ground She Stands On — Hindustan Zinc with Archetype
- Shubh Aarambh - Where Delivery Becomes Trust — Godrej Properties with Godrej Corporate Brand and Communications
- Strengthening the Brand from Within — ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India

The SABRE Award for Superior Achievement in Research and Planning

- #FilariaSeFight — Gates Foundation India with Organic by MSL
- Food u love, delivered! — Swiggy with We. Communications
- JioHotstar South Unbound: Rewriting the Narrative of Regional Storytelling — JioHotstar
- Making Conversations The New Storefront — WhatsApp, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- Safer Births by Design Building Quality into India's Private Maternity Care · #DontForgetMoms — Weber Shandwick India

The SABRE Award for Superior Achievement in Measurement and Evaluation

- Calling It Climate: How India Began to Recognise What It Was Already Experiencing — CEEW, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- From Fringe to Mainstream: Repositioning Plant-Based Nutrition in India's Chronic Disease Narrative — Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) with Adfactors PR
- McDonald's for Youth: From First Jobs to Future-Ready India — McDonald's India- North and East with First Partners
- Media Intelligence Behind McDonald's Protein Plus Launch — McDonald's India (West & South) with Concept BIU
- The Road to IPO — LG Electronics with Burson Genesis

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The SABRE Award for Superior Achievement in Creativity

- Creative Convergence: Growth Reimagined — British Council with MSL India
- Dimaag Pe Rakhe Lagaam — Center fresh with Avian We.
- Drivers Of Safety — HMEL - HPCL Mittal Energy Limited with Adfactors PR
- New Zealand's Invitation to Travel # Beyond the Filter — Tourism New Zealand with Current Global - The Weber Shandwick Collective, India
- The Art Trail of India: Automotive Storytelling Reimagined — Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) with First Partners

Geographic

India

- #FilariaSeFight — Gates Foundation India with Organic by MSL
- Bachpan Manao (Celebrate Childhood) on DailyHunt — EkStep Foundation
- From paper to policy: Rewriting India's 54-Year-Old Household Insecticide Rules for the Digital Age — Godrej Industries Group (Goodknight) with Corporate Brand & Communications
- From Stories to Leadership: Building Reputation the Godrej Way — Godrej Industries Group with GIG Corporate Brand & Communications
- India Against Rare Disease — IHW Council with Teamwork Communications Group

Bangladesh

- Winner: Vote SHE: Activating Bangladesh's Women Voters — Miss Bangladesh US Organization with Hiam Hafizuddin

South/Southeast Asia

- AI built for the last mile — Wadhvani AI with The Mavericks India, On Purpose, McCann
- Royal Enfield Amazing Thailand Ride — Royal Enfield with Blisses Point Communications
- Zung Ke Khilaaf Zinc — Hindustan Zinc with Archetype

International

- Winner: A Force For Good — Aditya Birla Group

Practice areas

Business-To-Business Marketing

- Building a Global Agri-AI Ecosystem with India at the Core — Findability Sciences with Value 360 Communications
- Okta: The Identity Evolution — Okta with 80dB Communications
- Safe Uttar Pradesh, Safer Nation: Beating Crime with YAKSH, the AI Police Platform — Staqu Technologies with First Partners
- Techno Digital - Building India's Digital Backbone — Techno Digital with Zeno India
- We Transform Mobility in India - Siemens at IREE 2025 — Siemens

Corporate Image

- ASUS Winning India — ASUS India with MSL Group
- Communications Transformation at AM/NS India — ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India
- From National Champion to Global Standard — CtrlS with Burson Genesis
- Fuelling India's Cricket Frenzy with "Deewane India Ka Deewana Humsafar" — Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) with First Partners
- Work that includes - India's First Toolkit for Employing Persons with Disabilities in Manufacturing — Godrej Industries Group with Atypical advantage, Godrej Consumer Products

Corporate Culture & Change

- Making the East Shine Again — Puri Rath Yatra 2025 — Coca-Cola India with First Partners
- Moms are Just Moms — Aditya Birla Group with Makani Creatives
- 'We A.R.E Better Together' — HDFC Bank

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Corporate Social Responsibility

- Bisleri Greener Promise — Bisleri International with Avian We.
- Empowering 1.5 million Lives — Samsung with Kaizen
- HerKadam — Jindal Steel
- Hum Raaton Mein Sooraj Ugaate Hain (We bring daylight to the darkest of nights) — Signify with Burson Genesis
- The E-Waste That We Eat (But Shouldn't) — Appliance business, Godrej Enterprises Group with AdFactors and Tribe Communications

Crisis/Issues Management

- #FilariaSeFight — Gates Foundation India with Organic by MSL
- #TariffHitsIndiaShifts — Akums Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Ltd with Teamwork Communications Group
- Disruption to Stability - Accountability, Action, Assurance — IndiGo with MSL
- Lionel Messi G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025 — Delhi Leg — Lionel Messi G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025 — Delhi Leg with Kommune Brand Communications
- The Sting Operation — Crisis Mitigation for Varthana — Varthana Finance with Concept Public Relations India

Digital and Social Media Campaign

- Decode Your Rhythm — Medtronic with popkorn
- Har Ghar Surakshit 2025 — The Accidental Invitation Initiative — Locks & Architectural Solutions, a business of Godrej Enterprises Group with AdFactors PR
- India AI Impact Summit 2026 — Ministry of Electronics & IT with MSL
- Relevance of Hair Oiling — Marico - Parachute Advansed
- WEP- Taking entrepreneurship to every part of India through the entrepreneurship platform — NITI Aayog with Avian We.

Diversity Communications

- #CelebratingAcceptance — Godrej Industries Group
- Built Like Steel — Jindal Steel
- Dismantling The Pipeline Myth For Women In Tech In The Age Of AI — ANSR and Talent500 with Kaizen

Employee and Workforce Engagement

- Celebrating You — Diageo India with Burson Genesis
- ICONIQ White 10 Mn Milestone The World's Fastest-Growing Millionaire Spirits Brand · Built for New India — Allied Blenders and Distillers with Weber Shandwick India
- Mission Health For All — Gland Pharma with Ruder Finn India
- Railblazers — Alstom India with Burson Genesis
- Strengthening the Brand from Within — ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India

Employer Branding

- Brand Behind the Rebrand — Amneal Pharmaceuticals with Ruder Finn Thunder India
- McDonald's for Youth: From First Jobs to Future-Ready India — McDonald's India- North and East with First Partners
- Mettle of India 2.0 — Jindal Steel

Financial and IPO Communications

- From Masala to Markets: How the Orkla India IPO Turned a Household Brand into an Investor Story — Orkla India Limited with AdFactors PR
- The Road to IPO — LG Electronics with Burson Genesis
- The strategic communications playbook behind Meesho's IPO success — Meesho with AdFactors PR

Integrated Marketing

- Ai+ Smartphone Launch Campaign — Ai+ Smartphone with Gnothi Seauton
- Engineering Influence: How storytelling became a lead-generation engine for FUJIFILM India — FUJIFILM India with The Mavericks India
- JioHotstar Live Streaming Excellence 2025 — JioHotstar
- Paragon at 50: Building India's Most Accessible Style-Led Footwear Brand — Paragon Footwear with 80 dB Communications
- Zung Ke Khilaaf Zinc — Hindustan Zinc with Archetype

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Marketing to Consumers (New Product)

- How Red Rock Deli Turned into India's Most Talked-About Gourmet Moment — PepsiCo – Red Rock Deli with Edelman India
- Škoda Octavia RS x Rishab Sharma — Škoda Auto India with NCC x MSL
- The Legend Returns – New Tata Sierra — Tata Motors with PR Pundit Havas Red
- Welcoming the iconic Lotus Biscoff to India — Mondelez India with Edelman India
- Your Baby Safe — Ed-a-Mamma with Kaizen

Marketing to Consumers (Existing Product)

- Locally Yours – Reviving India's Grassroots Retail in the Age of Quick Commerce — Coca-Cola India with First Partners
- Laakhon Mein Ek_ Turning a Milestone into a Moment of Meaning — Godrej Properties with Godrej Corporate Brand and Communications
- Naye Zamane Ka Naya Paint — Birla Opus Paints with Burson Genesis
- Pepsi Anytime — Pepsi with Edelman India
- Sunfeast Marie Light – Missing Wife — ITC Foods with Avian We.

Media Relations

- #StayCharged by Statiq: Powering India's EV Pulse — Statiq with Teamwork Communications Group
- Amazon Great Indian Festival 2025 — Amazon India with Avian We.
- Crew — Godrej Properties with Adfactors PR
- How India Instamarted – India, Decoded Through Its Carts — Instamart with We. Communications
- The Redseer Story: Built for High Stakes Work — Redseer Strategy Consultants with Zeno India

Public Affairs/Government Relations

- Advocacy for India's Bio-Energy Future — Indian Sugar & Bio-energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) with The Practice
- Advocating for Better Creches as a Public Good — Forum for Creche and Childcare Services (FORCES) with Avian We.
- India Maritime Week: DP World Powering India's Growth Story — DP World

Public Education

- Airtel Safe Network — Bharti Airtel with MSL India
- Calorie Conversion — Mars Pet Nutrition with The Practice
- Mothers of Courage — Mantra Social Services with Butterflyeffect Media
- Nationwide Mass Resignation of Kidneys — Manipal Health Enterprises with Concept Public Relations India
- The Cancer India Didn't Talk About — IHW Council with Teamwork Communications Group

Special Event

- #LightsOfChange — Gates Foundation India with Organic by MSL
- BLR Hubba 2026 - Festival of Festivals — UnboxingBLR with On Purpose and Ebony & Ivory PR
- Shaping India's AI story: The comms behind Sarvam AI's launch — Sarvam AI with Archetype Agency
- Veer Hanuman: When Faith Takes Flight — Sony SAB with Ruder Finn India
- Voices of Harvest — PepsiCo India with Chase Advisors

Emerging Markets

Emerging Markets

- Winner: Vaccine for Hope — Aditya Birla Memorial Hospital with FuzionPR

PR Aspirant/Student of the Year

PR Aspirant/Student of the Year

- PRana: Shaping the Story of India — Arushi Gund
- PRCAI: Shaping the Story of India — Chanchal Shekhawat
- Read India Again — Graceleen Kaur
- Reputation Is The New Trade Route — Yashika Chandwani
- The Reputation Ledger — Subarna Mukhopadhyay

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Industry sectors

Associations

- Calling It Climate: How India Began to Recognise What It Was Already Experiencing — CEEW, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- Reframing the Narrative: Startup Brands in the Funding Winter — Nasscom with Burson Genesis
- Safer Births by Design Building Quality into India's Private Maternity Care · #DontForgetMoms — Weber Shandwick India

Consumer Products/Services

- From Co-working Confusion to Capital Markets Conviction — WeWork India Management with Adfactors PR
- Launching In The Dark : How Patron El Alto aligned with a generation in ascent — Bacardi, India with Current Global, The Weber Shandwick Collective
- Protect What Matters — Panasonic Energy India with MSL
- Safe Floors, Happy Paws, Powered by Neem — ITC Nimyle with Burson Genesis
- Team India T20 World Cup Jersey Launch - Cricket — adidas India with MSL India

Fashion & Beauty

- #BreakfastForSkin by Fiamma — ITC Fiamma with Burson Genesis
- From Face to Feed- Turning Cultural Virality into Credible Conversations — L'Oréal Paris with Adfactors PR
- Jennifer Lopez X Zen Diamond — Zen Diamond India with Adfactors PR

Financial & Professional Services

- Axis Securities - The PESO Playbook — Axis Securities with Veritas Reputation PR
- Global Fintech Fest — Payments Council of India & Fintech Convergence Council with Adfactors PR
- Barni se Azadi — HDFC Mutual Fund with Adfactors PR

Food & Beverage

- Godrej Food Trends Report- Feast for the Future — Godrej Industries Group
- Powerhouse Ranveer Singh Unveils RANGEELA Vodka — ABD Maestro, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- Reviving Mitti Initiative: Lay's Ode to Good Soil Health — PepsiCo - Lays with Edelman India
- Sting Energy — Sound of Sting — PepsiCo - Sting with Edelman India
- The Making of a Modern Indian Legacy — Legacy, Bacardi India with Current Global - The Weber Shandwick Collective

Healthcare

- #CarefortheRare — MedGenome with GCI Health
- 'AI for Heal' - From Clinical Capability to Patient Conviction, The AI Healthcare Shift — Max Healthcare with First Partners
- kab tak karoge ignore — Medtronic with 9wings
- Safe Blood, Save Lives — Thalassemia Policy Advocacy Group with Avian We.
- Sanjeevani- The Pink Tag — Network 18 with Ruder Finn India

Industrial/Manufacturing

- Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony - ISP Rajayyapeta, Anakapalli, Andhra Pradesh — ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India
- From First to Forefront: Launching the DP World India Championship as India's New Global Sporting Platform — DP World
- Launching Cynlr's Object Intelligence Platform — Cynlr with 80 dB Communications
- Recharge for Change — Aditya Birla Group
- Steel of India Podcast — Jindal Steel

Media, Arts & Entertainment

- Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi — JioStar
- The Launch of JioHotstar — JioHotstar
- The Sports Front: India's First Legend Face Off — The Sports Front with Adfactors PR

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Not for Profit

- 5 Billion Meals by Akshay Patra — The Akshaya Patra Foundation with Brandcom PR
- Beyond Borders: Ideas That Move Nations — British Council with MSL India
- Every Smile Belongs — Smile Train India with The Practice
- From Field to Forum Devki Devi's Journey from Lived Experience to National Recognition — Gates Foundation, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- India Against Rare Disease — IHW Council with Teamwork Communications Group

Public Sector/Government

- Bio Unlock India — Biotechnology / Public Sector (Govt-backed innovation) with Teamwork Communications Group
- India AI Impact Summit 2026 — Ministry of Electronics & IT with MSL

Technology

- #IGDefenceTakeonOperationSindoor — IG Defence with Teamwork Communications Group
- Karnataka Bike Taxi Ban: Turning a Corner — Rapido with Burson Genesis
- Making Conversations The New Storefront — WhatsApp, India with Weber Shandwick, India
- Making Yotta the backbone of India's sovereign AI story — Yotta Data Services with Archetype India
- WazirX: #CryptoCupid — The Modern Love Language — WazirX with Adfactors PR

Travel & Leisure

- From Last to Recovered: Hong Kong's Return to Indian Travel — Hong Kong Tourism Board with Gnothi Seauton
- New Zealand's Invitation to Travel # Beyond the Filter — Tourism New Zealand with Current Global - The Weber Shandwick Collective, India
- Solo Women Travel Campaign: Freedom Takes the Wheel — IntrCity SmartBus with 80 dB Communications
- The Flying Canvas — Air India Express
- When Loyalty Took Centre Stage — Marriott International with Weber Shandwick India

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