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October 2024 • Vol. 2 • Issue 10

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INSIDE

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CEO LOUNGE

We invite you to consider the connections between new ideas and the challenges we face in our rapidly evolving world.

Welcome to this issue of Xplore, crafted to fuel your curiosity and encourage exploration into the innovative and creative forces shaping our daily lives. We've compiled a diverse array of articles, each designed to broaden your perspective and inspire deep thought about the implications of recent discoveries and advancements.

As you engage with these pages, we invite you to consider the connections between new ideas and the challenges we face in our rapidly evolving world. How might these innovations influence your personal and professional life? We encourage you to reflect on these questions as you explore the content, and perhaps, you'll find inspiration to apply these insights in new and meaningful ways.

Join us on this journey of curiosity and discovery. Let each article serve as a starting point for further inquiry and discussion, helping you to cultivate a deeper understanding of the complex world around us. Your perspectives are valuable to us, and we look forward to seeing how this issue sparks new ideas and conversations within our community.

Raghu Tata

Prof. Raghu Tata
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We encourage you to think critically about these intersections and to engage with the content actively.

In this edition of Xplore, we delve into the interconnectedness of our modern world and bring you thought-provoking content that bridges gaps between diverse disciplines, showcasing how integrated our global society has become.

As you read through these articles, we hope you'll appreciate the nuanced ways in which different areas of knowledge intersect and influence one another. From cultural impacts on technology to environmental considerations in new market strategies, the connections are rich and varied. This edition aims to inform and drive a deeper understanding of these relationships and their relevance to current global scenarios.

We encourage you to think critically about these intersections and to engage with the content actively. Your insights and discussions enrich our collective exploration and contribute significantly to the broader dialogue that Xplore seeks to facilitate.

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This issue of Xplore invites you to reflect on the dynamics of change—a constant force that shapes our environment, molds our societies, and shifts our worldviews. Through a carefully curated selection of articles, we explore various dimensions of change, from subtle societal shifts to major technological breakthroughs that promise to alter the course of our future.

Each piece offers a unique lens through which to view the impact of these changes, encouraging you to consider not just the immediate effects but the long-term implications as well. How do these changes manifest in everyday life? What challenges do they present, and what opportunities might they create? These are some of the questions we aim to tackle.

As you peruse this issue, we hope you find the content enlightening and thought-provoking. Reflect on your own experiences of change and consider how the insights gathered here might influence your understanding or actions going forward. This edition is about understanding and actively participating in the transformations that affect us all.

Hari Govind Nair

Hari Govind Nair
Editor

Xplore
A Leadership, Innovation & Excellence Collective
October 2024 | Volume 2 | Issue 10

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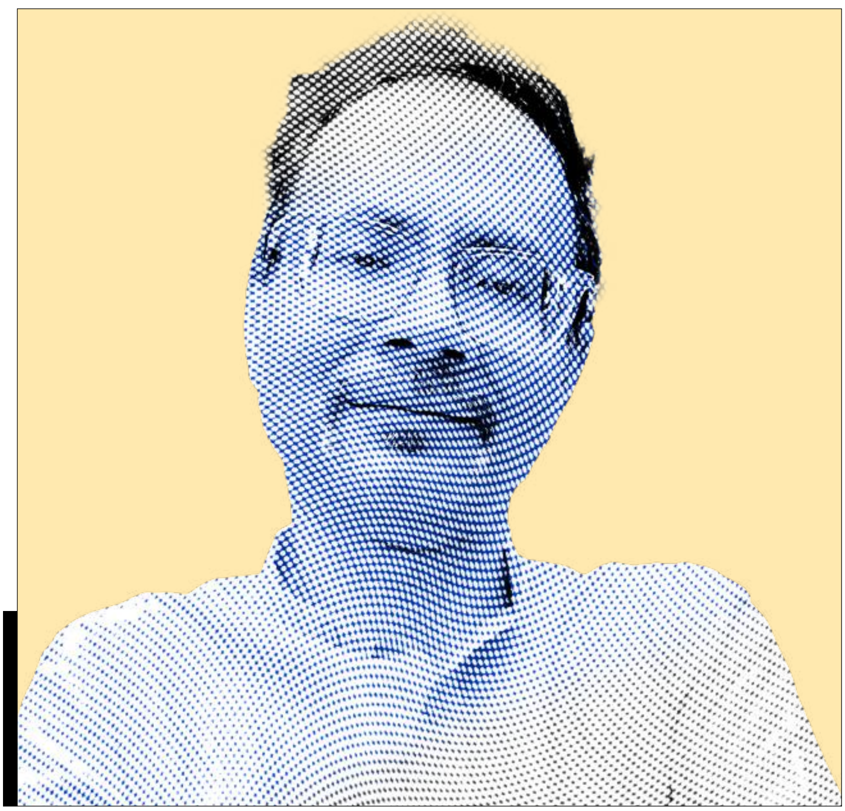


WHAT'S Inside

Immersive Tech:
The Future that Business Await

In an age where technology is ever-evolving, immersive technologies like AR and VR are not just trends; they're reshaping how businesses engage with consumers and streamline operations

by Ashrut Sharma

In this era of an ever-changing technological environment, several groundbreaking technologies have made their mark. Among this non-exhaustive list of technological disruptions, immersive technology is slowly but steadily entering the mainstream business world.

Immersive technology refers to any technology that extends reality or creates a new reality by leveraging a 360-degree space. Since it makes use of the 360-degree space/sphere, users can look in any direction and see content. Some types of immersive technology extend reality by overlaying digital images on a user's environment, while others create an entirely new reality by fully immersing users in a digital environment, shutting them out from the physical world. The different types of immersive technology include 360, VR (virtual reality), AR (augmented reality), MR (mixed reality), and XR (extended reality). These technologies can be integrated into business operations, helping to create value.

From Reality to Virtuality

There are several real-world examples where businesses have incorporated immersive technologies and received rave reviews from industry insiders and consumers alike. Lenskart, for instance, leverages 3D AR technology on its app, allowing customers to virtually try on different frames and see which suits them best. This has added convenience for customers; they no longer need to visit physical stores if they don't want to. They can now select frames from the comfort of their couch.

Immersive technology is slowly but steadily entering the mainstream business world, leveraging 360-degree spaces to create new realities for users

Myntra has integrated AR/VR technologies into its platform, most notably through the virtual try-on feature. This feature allows shoppers to upload a photo of themselves and virtually try on different apparel, providing them with a highly immersive and interactive experience.

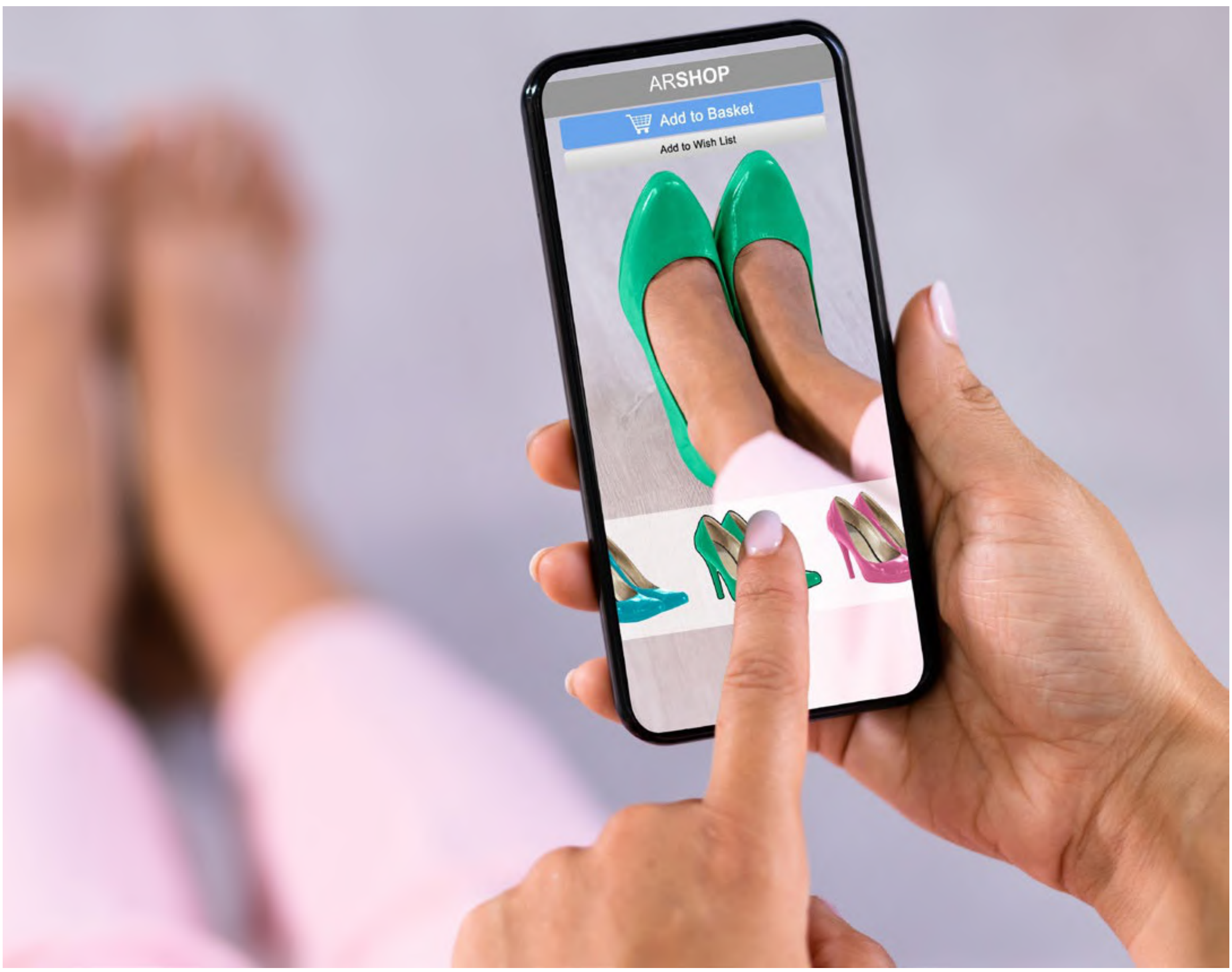
Amazon has also adopted immersive technology by enabling shoppers to place realistic 3D images of home furnishings in a virtual living room, giving customers a better sense of how the items would look. The AR-based "View in Your Room" tool even allows customers to change the colour of virtual room walls, carpeting, and flooring, as well as the products themselves.

Navigating the Hurdles

Immersive technologies such as AR/VR have high potential, but their adoption is still very slow, and not many stakeholders are leveraging their value. Due to the high development costs, the complexity of AR/VR devices, and other challenges, these technologies are still tiptoeing their way into the commercial world.

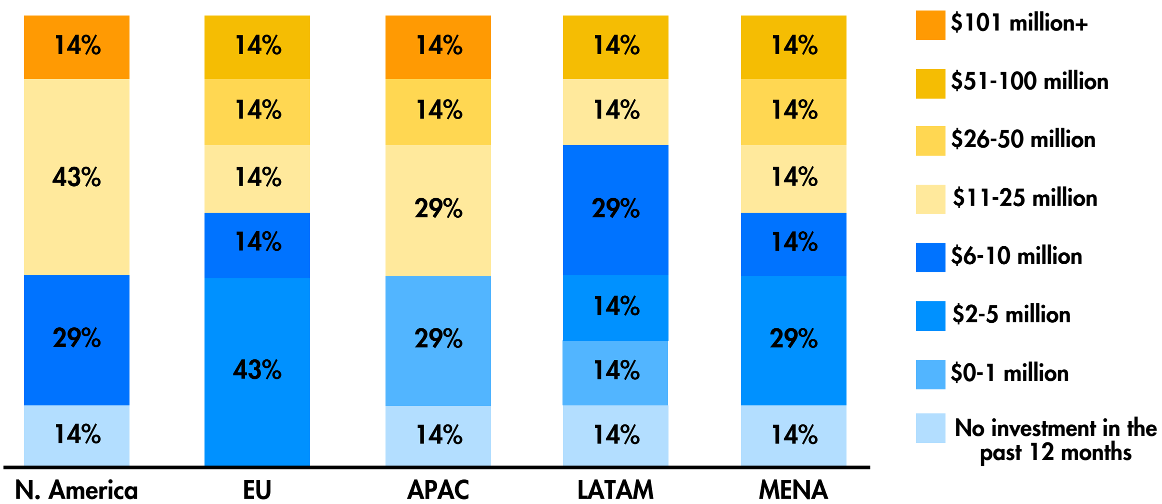
There is also a lack of standardised platforms, with no single standard for AR/VR technologies. Additionally, a fragmented user base, privacy concerns related to AR/VR, and potential friction in retail transactions are other factors slowing down the adoption of these technologies. Addressing these issues will be key to driving mass adoption.

According to IDC, in 2018, global spending on AR/VR was estimated at $17.8 billion, with the



Lenskart's use of 3D AR technology allows customers to virtually try on frames, eliminating the need to visit physical stores

Worldwide investment in AV/VR market in the last 12 months



Source: MarketsandMarkets Research

Global spending on AR/VR is projected to grow significantly, with retail expected to lead investments in this immersive technology landscape

commercial sector (including retail, transportation, manufacturing, and public sectors) representing over 60 per cent of the total spend. IDC anticipated by 2021 this share would grow to 85 per cent, driven by strong adoption in commercial use cases. Retail was expected to lead AR/VR investments, with sectors like transportation and manufacturing following closely.

According to MarketsandMarkets, the VR market is projected to grow from $6.1 billion in 2020 to $20.9 billion by 2025, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27.9 per cent during that period.

Moving forward, AR/VR technologies are set to play a significant role in transforming how businesses operate. Increased awareness and government support at the ground level will be crucial in enabling the mass adoption of immersive technologies.

Ashrut Sharma
is a first-year PGD(HRM) student at XLRI Jamshedpur

“Balancing Passion with Acceptance is Key to Success”

Rohit Bahadur, Partner at Grant Thornton, has been a driving force in setting up the firm's CSR and not-for-profit vertical, bringing over 25 years of experience in risk advisory and governance. In an insightful conversation with *Sahil Agarwal*, Rohit shares how international exposure shaped his career, the firm's growth as a challenger brand, and why fostering convergence between corporates, NGOs, and the government is crucial for the future of CSR in India. His advice to young leaders? Embrace flexibility and maintain a balanced perspective.

Rohit, with over 25 years of experience in due diligence, assurance, corporate governance, and risk advisory, what motivated your transition from the Big Four to leading the CSR and not-for-profit vertical at Grant Thornton? What challenges did you encounter in establishing this division, and how did you navigate them?

Actually, it wasn't a transition. I was already at Grant Thornton, working in the risk advisory practice. Two driving factors led to this shift. One, Grant Thornton was looking to establish this practice in India, and they needed someone suitable to lead it. Two, we were receiving a lot of work on the audit side that was being handled in an incorrect division.

So, the idea was to merge some skill sets and place them in a new division. This opportunity came at a point in my career when I felt the need to do something slightly different. While I wasn't directly working in the development sector, I realised that by offering services within the sector, I would still interact with people doing meaningful work on the ground. Rather than only engaging with corporates, I'd be able to connect with individuals actively involved in development efforts. This prospect was quite motivating for me — it offered something different and allowed me to engage with a new set of people.

In the corporate world, it's easy to lose sight of social contributions, as financial considerations often take precedence. While pursuing a different sector might lead to higher earnings, it's crucial for young individuals to weigh these decisions carefully at every stage of their careers. Balancing personal and societal impact is a significant choice we all face.

True, but I had the comfort of still being at Grant Thornton and being paid accordingly. Of course, compared to some of the other higher-performing or revenue-generating divisions, it's less, but it was a conscious choice, and I've never regretted it. It's been quite interesting.

With your extensive background in risk management and corporate governance, how do you think the approach to governance has evolved in India, particularly in the development and corporate sectors?

I believe the level of governance in the development sector still has a long way to go. The sector itself is often tainted, and with the recent FCRA (Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act) rejections, there's a significant question mark around how well some NGOs are actually governed. That's one aspect. The other part is that much of the governance issues stem from ignorance rather than intentional wrongdoing. So, in the corporate development sector, everything you do needs to be approached with a capacity-building lens.

What lessons from your work in the private sector have you found particularly useful in advising not-for-profits and NGOs?

I've managed to apply what I learned in the private sector by combining patience with the process-oriented mindset I developed in risk advisory. In that role, I was exposed to various functions and learned to think in a systematic way. This has allowed me to bring those insights into the development sector, without forcing them onto others.

How do you see the evolving role of internal and grant audits in ensuring transparency and accountability in the development sector, where social impact is harder to measure than financial returns?
While you need to adopt a capacity-building approach, it's also important to visit the NGO and understand their programmatic work. Financial diligence can only be done effectively once you understand their history and what they've achieved. It goes beyond a checklist approach. It has to come from experience. Only then can you achieve meaningful due diligence. If you rely solely on a checklist, you won't fully meet the objective of conducting thorough diligence.

The level of governance in the development sector has a long way to go; recent FCRA rejections raise questions about how well some NGOs are governed

You also initiated the CSR division at Grant Thornton...
Yes, I did. This was before CSR became a trend in India. Back then, it wasn't seen as "fashionable" like it is now, especially with the law and ESG initiatives. In fact, many didn't understand why we were doing it at all.

You've also worked in the US with a food distribution company and taken a specialised risk management course in Manila. How did these international experiences broaden your perspective, and how do you apply global best practices to your work in India?
Honestly, more than just work practices, being abroad gave me a completely different perspective on how things operate. It made me more well-rounded in my thinking. When I was in the US, I was at a very junior level, so I haven't necessarily replicated specific practices here. However, the exposure to different people and ways of working gave me a more flexible approach to understanding things.

Financial diligence requires a deep understanding of an NGO's history and achievements; it's about meaningful due diligence, not just a checklist

How have culture, leadership, and service offerings at Grant Thornton evolved during your more than two decades with the firm? How does Grant Thornton ensure it stays relevant and competitive in a rapidly evolving consulting landscape?
I think we've done very well to establish ourselves as a challenger brand. We don't consider ourselves the fifth-largest firm or compare ourselves in that way — we've built our own unique identity. In fact, I'd say other firms are often wary of us because of that distinct identity. Over the years, Grant Thornton has consistently punched above its weight, always aiming higher than our size would suggest, and this mindset has fueled our growth. Even now, the firm's growth has been tremendous, and our focus on CSR has further added to our brand value.

What approaches do you take to mentor and guide the next generation of leaders within the firm, particularly in specialised areas like risk advisory and governance?
At Grant Thornton, coaching and mentoring are embedded in the culture, with a structured system of coaches and super coaches. This structure facilitates guidance. Until recently, we weren't a very large firm, so staying connected with colleagues was easier. It felt more like a family where we could work closely and engage informally. Personally, I go beyond my role to share my experiences and ensure I'm accessible to anyone who has questions. I maintain an open culture in my team, where anyone can reach out to me directly.

What's one piece of advice you'd offer to young students or aspiring managers?
I'd say, don't be overly aggressive and try to fine-tune yourself to the environment. For the current generation, a certain level of acceptance is key to success. You can't just be doing things you like or you're passionate about — you also need to embrace what comes your way. A relationship with a corporate is a two-way street. It's about how you adapt to the culture, like any relationship. So, accepting things without questioning everything too soon will serve the current generation well.

AI Meets HR: A New Era of Collaboration

Artificial intelligence is revolutionising human resource management, blending technology and human insight to create a more efficient and inclusive workplace for all

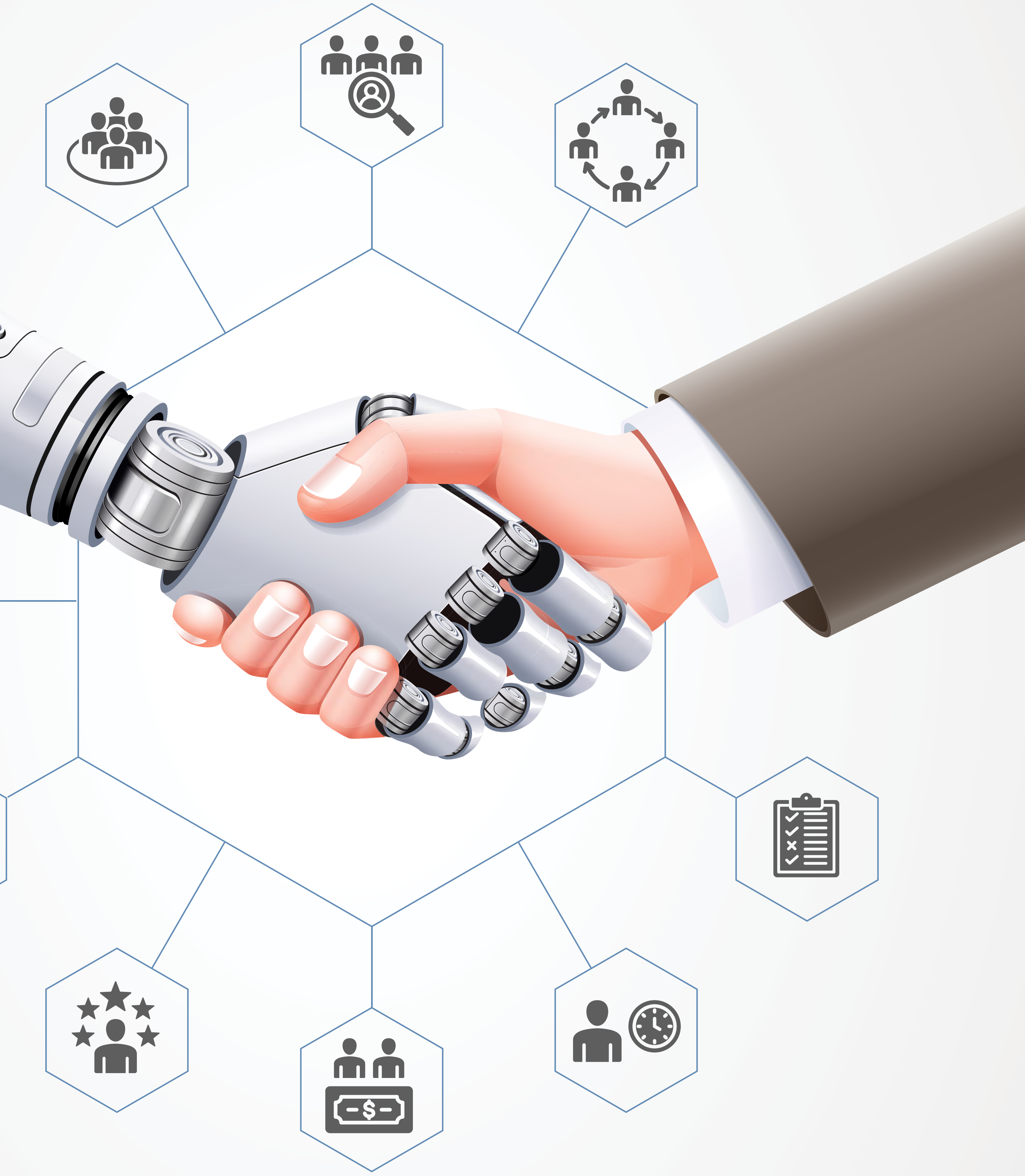
by Shreiya Tandon

From the C-suite to the soldiers in knee-deep trenches, artificial intelligence (AI) has infiltrated every conversation across every arena — even human resource management (HRM). HRM is primarily a people-centric industry, yet AI continues to trigger profound transformations. Leading organisations are embracing AI-human collaboration, leveraging AI to enhance and complement human abilities, offering a promising future for the workplace.

This synergy is proving to be notably effective in four critical areas of HRM: recruitment, performance evaluation, the streamlining of routine tasks, and tailored employee development.

Recruitment Revolution

Recruitment and talent acquisition are fundamental responsibilities of the HR department. Here, AI-driven algorithms are writing tailored job descriptions, screening résumés, matching candidates, and even recording initial interviews. They can analyse large volumes of applications to predict employee retention and success in specific roles. After AI has narrowed down the candidate pool, HR professionals step in to conduct final interviews, assessing cultural fit and factors like team compatibility and interpersonal skills. The final decision is then made through human capabilities such as empathy, intuition, and understanding.



AI systems can effectively minimise biases in hiring, ensuring a more diverse pool of candidates and promoting equity in decision-making

When trained properly, AI systems can be powerful allies during the initial screening process, effectively removing several biases traditionally associated with hiring. These tools can ensure a more diverse pool of candidates and promote equity in decision-making. Some top consulting firms are already harnessing AI's potential to monitor inclusivity in hiring, empowering HR professionals with a more objective and fair recruitment process.

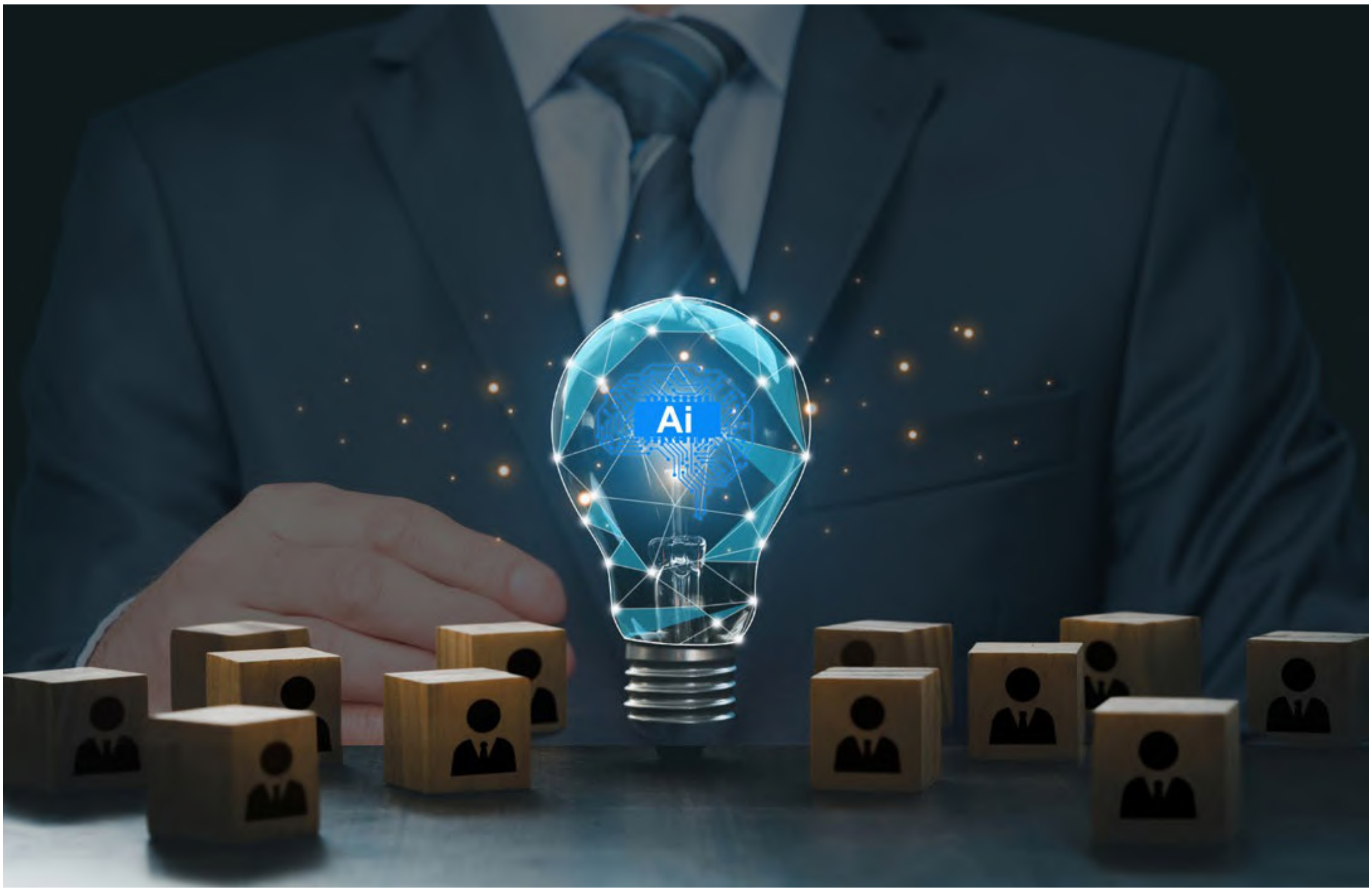
Performance Power-Up

AI tools can track and analyse employee performance by identifying patterns in work habits and behaviours, predicting periods of productivity and potential burnout. HR professionals can then assess the situation holistically, considering factors such as workload, personal challenges, or team dynamics. This approach provides quantitative evidence of conflict or a toxic work environment negatively affecting an employee's output.

Automatic for the People

Administrative and routine tasks, such as scheduling interviews, processing payroll, and managing employee inquiries, are increasingly being handed over to AI-powered chatbots and automation tools. This allows HR teams to focus on more complex responsibilities like leadership development, employee engagement, and organisational strategy.

Employees can now consult chatbots for daily queries or clarifications on company policy, while HR can dedicate its attention to issues requiring critical thinking and empathetic intervention. HR professionals can still step in to provide context and resolution when chatbots are unable to do so.



Human oversight is essential to ensure AI upholds ethical standards and respects privacy while aligning with company culture and objectives

Tailored Just for You!

AI systems are also being used to monitor employee performance and create personalised learning pathways. Based on an employee's current capabilities, career goals, and past performance data, AI can recommend professional development courses, training programmes, and skill-building exercises. Upskilling enhances worker efficiency, and tailored learning experiences significantly improve employee motivation and affinity with the organisation.

HR professionals play a crucial role in training AI systems, offering guidance, mentorship, and valuable feedback to enhance learning quality and ensure that programmes align with company culture and objectives. By incorporating employee feedback, HR can further refine predictive models and verify that learning applications meet organisational objectives. This human oversight is crucial to ensuring that AI is employed in a way that benefits both the company and its employees while upholding ethical standards.

Navigating the AI Frontier

With great power comes great responsibility. AI has immense potential, and when used correctly, it can bring significant benefits to HRM. However, concerns over privacy and ethics in data management have hindered its adoption. Companies are sceptical about integrating technology that does not have a regulatory framework to structure it. In such an ambiguous environment, compliance becomes a challenge.

Only through the synergy of AI and humans can organisations effectively utilise AI capabilities. Human supervision is essential to ensure that AI respects privacy, upholds ethical standards, and complies with regulations.

Shreiya Tandon
is a first-year PGDM(IEV) student at XLRI Delhi

"Understanding Consumer Behaviour Starts on the Streets"

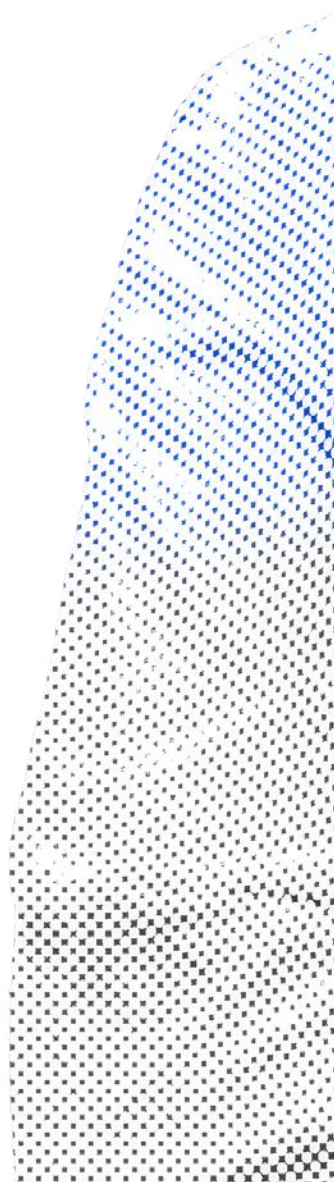
Himadri Roy Chaudhuri, Professor of Marketing at XLRI Jamshedpur, brings over two decades of academic expertise enriched by a prior career in esteemed advertising agencies. With this blend of academic prowess and advertising savviness, he champions experiential learning in his classrooms. From the streets to scholarly research, he explores how these insights shape modern marketing strategies. *Kaushik Ghosh* and *Ojasvin Nagpal* discuss his perspectives on this engaging journey.

You have an extensive career that spans both academia and advertising agencies. How has this professional journey shaped your approach to teaching and research in marketing?
Although advertising may not be a popular career choice for many in my generation, I have always been passionate about working in the field. I am in academia because of my strong interest in the practice. I used to have so many questions about how advertising worked and what it was like that I felt a career in academia was the only way to get the answers. There weren't many academic options available at the time, and the competition was fierce. Nevertheless, I believe the effort was worthwhile. My three years in the advertising industry taught me the value of hard work, creativity, and thinking outside the box, in addition to the significance of devotion to one's job.

Your research focuses on consumer lived experiences and consumption phenomena. How do you integrate these concepts into your teaching methods?
That's an intriguing question. Anyone who has taken my Principles of Marketing classes understands the importance of responsible marketing. We explore customers' experiences extensively. I believe that marketing is best taught on the streets and in the homes of customers. I often assign live projects that require interaction with customers and stakeholders — this is the first step towards consumer-centric decision-making. Many of the concepts I teach in class are rooted in a long legacy of consumer culture research, but I make them accessible and relevant to future leaders in the field.

Could you share some insights into the evolving area of consumer research, particularly marketisation, and its relevance in today's market landscape?
Marketing is a constantly evolving subject that involves more than just transactions and relationships within a market. It's not as simple as thinking that all interactions between people can be "managed" (for business purposes). Marketing studies and applies how people engage in transactions. Consider the various types of transactions that come to mind; each might require a very different approach to marketing and selling. However, there are significant negative aspects of marketisation, which involves legitimising market processes and transactions for profit. Tomorrow's managers must understand how to operate within the market for the "greater good."

As a cancer survivor, you actively campaign for organ donation and sustainable consumption. How do you incorporate these advocacy efforts into your academic work and teaching?
That is indeed a personal question. While I prefer to move forward from that experience, I want to emphasise the importance of contributing positively to society and



supporting others. This advocacy aligns with the evolving concept of responsible marketing, which I teach. Many health issues arise from irresponsible consumption, pollution, and unsustainable lifestyles. We are consuming our way to destruction, and addressing these issues in our teachings and practices is crucial.

Could you discuss your current research projects exploring issues of marginalisation, gender identity, rehumanisation, and dirty work? How do these topics contribute to our understanding of consumer behaviour?
Marketing is a layered concept and a humane study of human behaviour in transactions. I try to take an unorthodox look into areas of transaction that are not often mainstream and remain overlooked in regular experiences. This endeavour provides me with a unique perspective on the everyday lives of people.

You've been actively involved in organising conferences and workshops. What are the key takeaways you hope participants gain from these events, particularly in the context of marketing and consumer culture?
As I often say, I am a student of human behaviour. Conferences are a great place to meet people with diverse ideas and backgrounds. One of the best perks of academia is attending and organising conferences and being fascinated by expressions of creativity, regardless of the discipline.

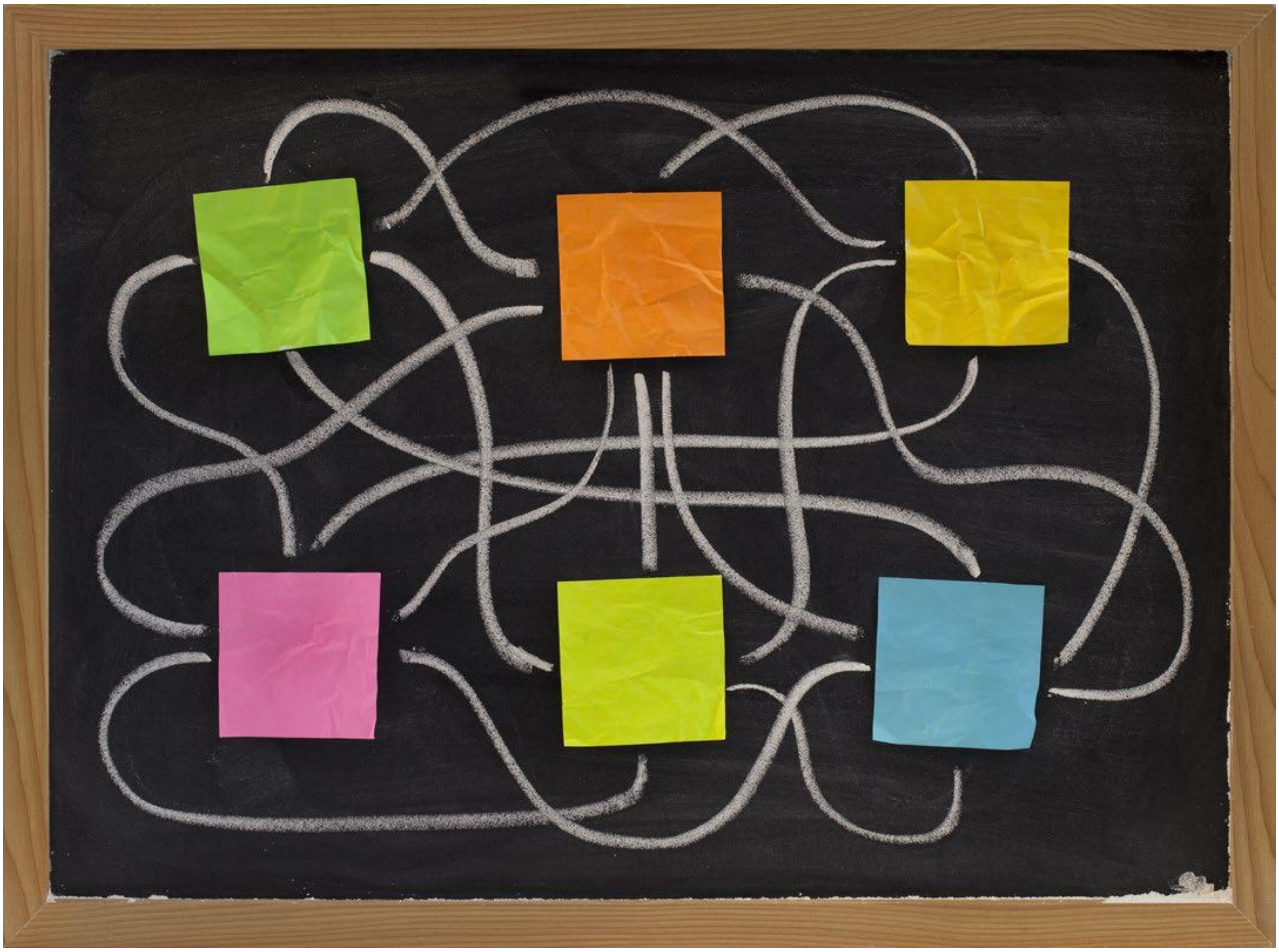
With your experience as an examiner for doctoral research, what advice would you offer to aspiring researchers in the field of marketing, especially those pursuing their PhDs?
Evaluating a thesis is similar to any other examination; specific criteria must be used to judge the work. For those who are passionate and derive more pleasure from their work than from material things, research is a rewarding journey. While this may be true for many professions, academia particularly excels in valuing passion over possessions.

You've won several best paper awards and actively contribute to the field of consumer culture studies. What advice would you give to MBA students interested in publishing their research in peer-reviewed journals?
There have been many instances where students have made significant academic contributions. However, I feel that the MBA curriculum in its current form doesn't fully support research-based education, which can limit opportunities. Nonetheless, students can pursue their research ambitions by collaborating with other scholars.

> **Marketing is best taught on the streets and in the homes of customers, with live projects that require interaction with customers and stakeholders**

Could you share your thoughts on the role of technology in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in the context of emerging markets like India?
Many things we do today would not be possible without technology. The impact of technology goes far beyond the common understanding of terms like IoT. Technology underpins everything we use. However, we need to carefully consider how we use technology and its long-term implications. If we blindly adopt Western practices, we risk losing our cultural diversity and may face sustainability issues in the long run.

As a member of the Macromarketing Society, what emerging trends or challenges do you see in the field of marketing, and how do you think educators can address them in their teachings?
Macromarketing is a branch of marketing that has evolved significantly over the past 40 years. It looks at how markets affect society as a whole and how society affects markets. Much of what I discuss comes from the extensive history of macromarketing studies, which delve



into areas such as technology, consumer behaviour, gender issues, and more. One of the most intriguing concepts in macromarketing is "wicked problems," which refer to complex issues where vice and virtue intersect. These topics are frequently introduced in my classes to help students understand the broader implications of marketing practices.

How do you balance your academic responsibilities with your personal interests in travel, history, and culinary practice? Do you find any intersections between these hobbies and your academic pursuits?
For me, hobbies remain hobbies. I cook not only because I enjoy it, but also to ensure I have quality meals. Cooking is something I took up while working long hours in the industry. From simple, time-saving meals that save money and keep you healthy to more intricate and complex menus, the journey has been long and enjoyable. I generally keep my hobbies separate from my professional interests. However, meeting new people and experiencing different cultures is always exciting and provides food for thought.

Finally, what advice would you give to MBA students aspiring to pursue a career in marketing, considering the dynamic nature of the industry and evolving consumer trends?
You are intelligent enough to read the writing on the wall. The geopolitical situation in India is changing rapidly, and you need to stay alert to keep up with shifting consumer preferences. A good marketer is shaped by real-world experiences and observations. Don't shut your eyes and ears to what's happening around you.

The concept of 'wicked problems' in macromarketing highlights complex issues where vice and virtue intersect, offering broader insights into marketing practices

The Carbon Conundrum: Can Big Tech's AI Boom Coexist with Sustainability?

As tech giants like Amazon and Apple expand their AI capabilities, the environmental toll of massive data centres raises urgent concerns about their sustainability commitments

by Sukanya Chatterjee

As companies like Amazon and Apple make bold promises about achieving carbon neutrality, a critical question emerges: Can their rapid AI growth and reliance on data centres truly align with their sustainability goals?

These tech giants are undeniably at the forefront of innovation, but the hidden cost is the enormous carbon footprint generated by their ever-expanding infrastructure. Specifically, data centres, the engines behind AI, consume massive amounts of electricity, raising concerns about the true environmental impact of this progress.

Energy-Hungry AI Models

AI's rise has led to an unprecedented surge in energy consumption. In 2021, data centres consumed around 200 terawatt-hours (TWh) of electricity globally, roughly 1 per cent of the world's total electricity use. To put this in perspective, training just one large AI model, like GPT-3, can emit 552 metric tons of CO_2 —the equivalent of the lifetime emissions of five cars. These figures are expected to grow as AI adoption accelerates, putting immense pressure on the planet's resources.

For Amazon, this has meant a huge increase in energy demand. Its cloud arm, AWS, now accounts for 72 per cent of Amazon's total energy consumption, driven by the need to power AI and other data-heavy services.

Apple, too, faces challenges despite its claims of running on 100 per cent renewable energy in its operations. The sheer scale of data required for its devices and services, such as iPhones and iCloud, means significant carbon emissions are still being generated from suppliers who continue to rely on fossil fuels.

The Illusion of Carbon Neutrality

To offset their rising emissions, Amazon, Apple, and other tech giants often rely heavily on Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) and carbon offsets. While these tools are useful for balancing the books, they don't always

In 2021, data centres consumed around 200 terawatt-hours of electricity globally, roughly 1 per cent of the world's total electricity use

Artificial intelligence is revolutionising industries, but its growth shouldn't come at the planet's expense

result in real-world reductions in fossil fuel use. Amazon, for instance, has been criticised for relying on low-quality RECs, which may not provide meaningful environmental benefits. Additionally, Amazon's decision to exclude emissions from third-party products sold on its platform means a large portion of its footprint remains hidden.

Apple, on the other hand, has a clearer roadmap towards sustainability but still struggles with its supplier network. Many of its suppliers continue to depend on fossil fuels, complicating Apple's ambitious goal of becoming fully carbon-neutral by 2030. The rise of AI, which increases the demand for energy-intensive data processing, only adds to the challenge.

Balancing Innovation and Impact

The growth of AI is a double-edged sword for big tech. On one hand, it offers incredible innovations, but on the other, it requires vast data centres that consume enormous amounts of energy. Without a dramatic shift towards truly renewable energy sources and more energy-efficient technologies, these companies' carbon-neutral claims risk becoming just another form of greenwashing.

It's clear that if tech companies want to lead the world into an AI-powered future, they must take sustainability seriously. Big tech must move beyond just carbon accounting tricks and start reducing their actual energy consumption. AI is revolutionising industries, but its growth shouldn't come at the planet's expense.

The question is no longer just about achieving carbon neutrality — it's about doing so in a way that truly benefits the environment.

So, as AI becomes the engine of progress, the bigger question looms: Will it drive a sustainable future or simply power more servers? The choice is in big tech's hands.

Sukanya Chatterjee
is a second-year PGDM(HRM)student at XLRI, Jamshedpur

Telemedicine Rx: Transforming Healthcare Access in India

Telemedicine is revolutionising healthcare across India, bringing specialist care to rural areas and bridging long-standing gaps with technology, convenience, and life-saving access

by Vaishnavi Ojha

In a vast country like India, where more than 65 per cent of people live in rural areas with limited healthcare options, telemedicine has truly changed the game. It's not just a quick fix; it's a big step forward in how people access healthcare. With technologies like smartphones, AI, and 5G, quality healthcare is now closer than ever. What once seemed impossible for many people in remote villages is now just a few taps away. Telemedicine is breaking down old barriers and creating a new way to deliver healthcare that is more fair and efficient.

India's Healthcare: A System Under Pressure

India's healthcare system struggles to provide adequate care for everyone, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. There's a serious shortage of doctors, with only one doctor for every 1,457 people, which is significantly lower than the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation. Furthermore, specialists like cardiologists and neurologists typically work only in cities, leaving rural populations with very limited access to specialised care.

With just one doctor for every 1,457 people in India, telemedicine bridges the healthcare gap, allowing patients to receive vital care without long-distance travel

A report from NITI Aayog shows that only 20 per cent of rural households have access to telehealth services, highlighting the gaps that still exist. That's why telemedicine is so vital. It allows people to consult doctors without travelling long distances, which can be life-saving. Telemedicine is transforming how healthcare works by enabling patients to receive the treatment they need when they need it.

Success Stories: How Telemedicine is Changing Lives

Platforms like eSanjeevani have been crucial in this transformation, facilitating over 100 million teleconsultations since their inception. For instance, there was a case where a patient in a rural area was diagnosed with a serious illness and received emergency care through telemedicine, which ultimately saved his life. This service also helps manage long-term conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and tuberculosis. Women, particularly those who cannot afford to travel, have found telemedicine especially beneficial for regular check-ups.

When junior doctors went on strike in New Delhi in July 2024, telemedicine became a lifeline for around 500 patients on the very first day. Even amid the protests, healthcare services continued online, showing how flexible and reliable telemedicine can be during challenging times.

Public-private partnerships, such as those between Intelehealth and eSanjeevani, are helping to expand telemedicine in states like Jharkhand, Odisha, and Maharashtra. These collaborations are crucial for ensuring that rural patients can access specialist care without waiting for months.

Barriers to Progress

Despite the many benefits of telemedicine, it's not without its challenges. One significant issue is the digital divide; many rural areas still don't have reliable internet access. For telemedicine to function effectively, we need robust digital infrastructure, such as broadband and smartphones, which are not available everywhere.

As AI diagnostics and 5G networks expand, telemedicine will offer real-time consultations and even remote surgeries, making specialist care accessible to all, regardless of location

Concerns about data security and patient privacy also persist. Some patients are hesitant to share their health information online, and there's skepticism about whether remote consultations can truly replace in-person visits. To make telemedicine successful, companies must prioritise patient information security. Platforms like eSanjeevani are attempting to address this by using end-to-end encryption and regular security audits, but there is still much work to be done.

Looking Ahead: New Technologies

The future of telemedicine in India looks promising, especially with exciting developments like AI diagnostics, wearable health trackers, and the expansion of 5G networks. These new technologies will make telemedicine even better, enabling real-time consultations and even remote surgeries.

With AI, doctors may soon be able to diagnose conditions more quickly and accurately, while wearable devices can help monitor patients' health continuously. Imagine a world where a patient in a remote village can have a virtual heart surgery consultation with a leading doctor in Delhi without leaving his home.

How India Stacks Up Globally

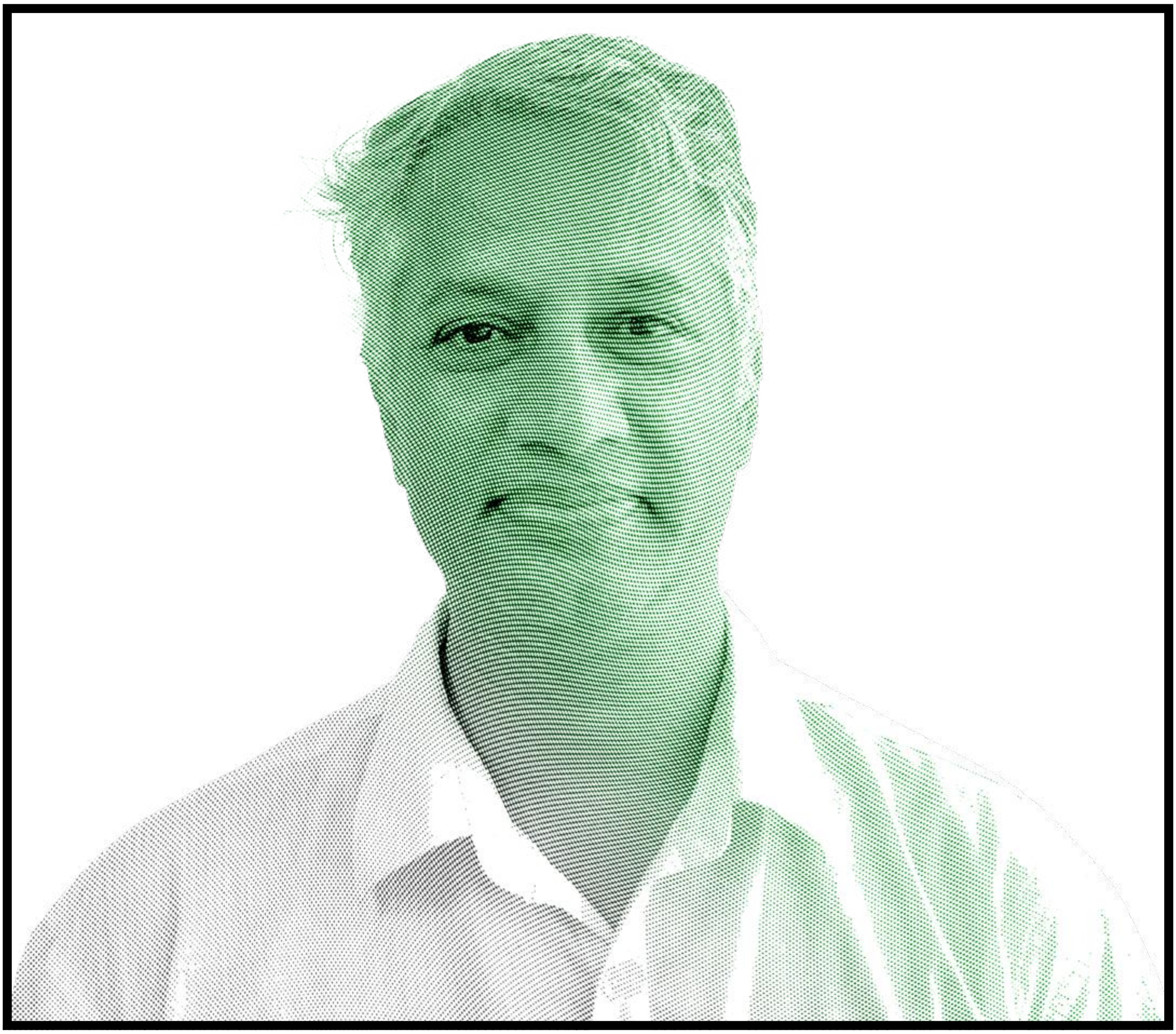
India's telemedicine model is unique because it focuses on primary care. In countries like the US and those in Europe, telemedicine is primarily used for specialised care. In India, however, it aims to provide remote consultations for common health issues like fever and diabetes. This makes India's system more inclusive, though there are still lessons to learn from other nations, particularly in leveraging advanced AI technologies and ensuring universal access to these services.

A Hopeful Future

Telemedicine in India is not just about technology; it's a crucial tool for making healthcare fairer. As the country continues to invest in digital infrastructure and new technologies, telemedicine will only expand. It has the potential to save lives, lower costs, and provide timely care to those who need it most.

However, for telemedicine to truly succeed, we must tackle issues like the digital divide, data security, and public trust. If these issues can be addressed, India could lead the way in healthcare accessibility. The future of telemedicine looks bright, and it's an exciting time for healthcare in India.

Vaishnavi Ojha
is a second-year PGD(BM) student at XLRI, Jamshedpur



"AI Will Complement, Not Replace, Strategic Management"

In an engaging discussion, **Munish Thakur**, Assistant Professor at XLRI, shares his thoughts on the evolving role of AI in strategic management and the importance of individuality in MBA students. Interviewed by *Nandhini S,* Munish emphasises how professionals who bridge traditional strategies with AI will shape the future.

You pursued a PhD from IIM Calcutta. How do you think pursuing a doctorate has contributed to your teaching pedagogy in an MBA programme?
There are several advantages I can think of. First, it helps you understand what it takes to teach MBA students at a top institution. Being part of the class yourself gives you insights into their expectations and challenges. In India, academic schedules used to be quite different compared to institutions like IIM or XLRI.

In an MBA programme, especially with the term system, students are suddenly exposed to subjects they haven't encountered before. For instance, an engineer might have to study economics or finance, while someone with a humanities background might dive into statistics. This creates a fast-paced environment where students don't have much time to adjust or learn at their own pace, as they might in an annual or semester system.

So, when I teach, I try to empathise with students, understanding the pressure they feel. Having been in their shoes, I can relate to their experience.

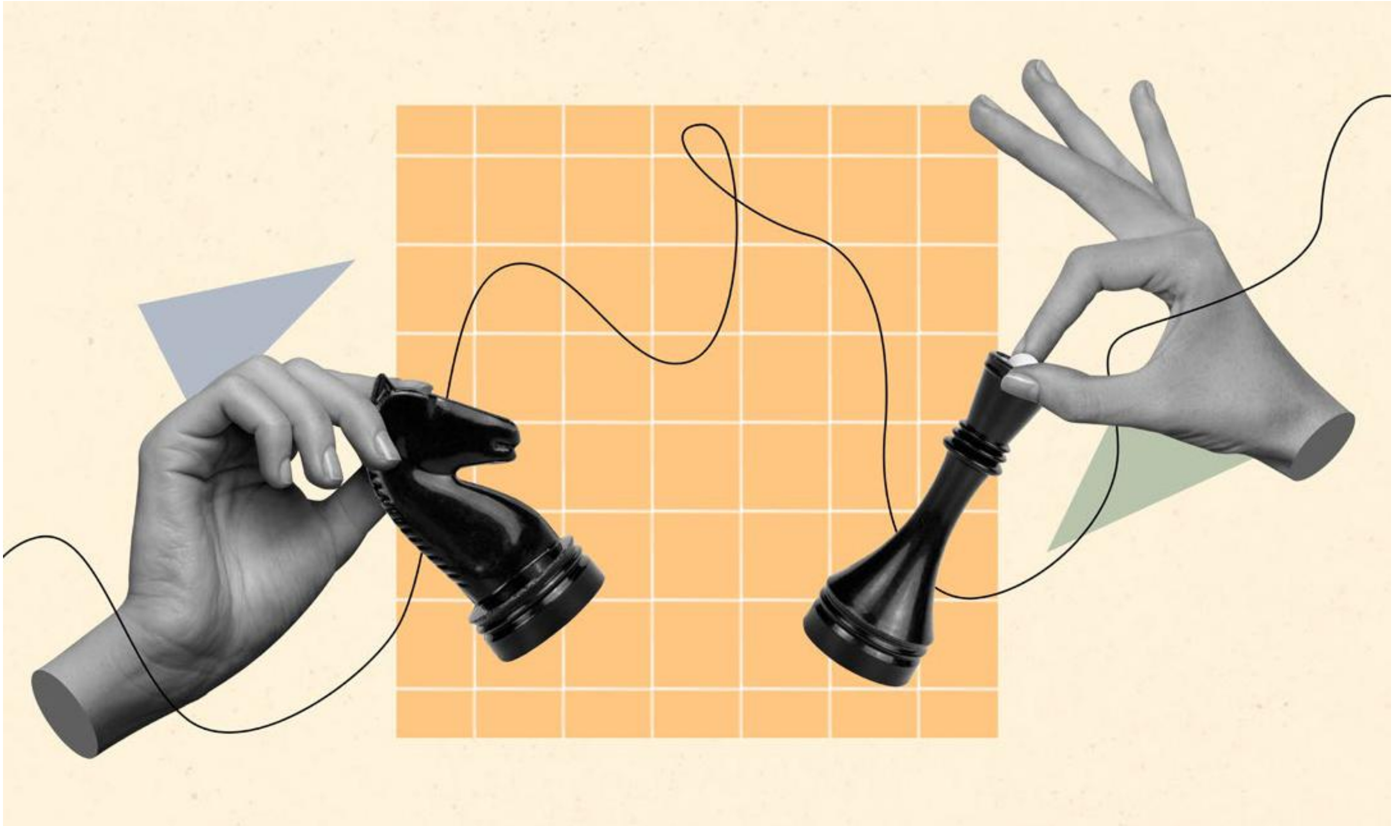
The second advantage of pursuing a PhD is the academic journey itself, which is crucial for both students and professors. While teaching a subject with an established body of knowledge is one aspect, a PhD also encourages you to develop your own perspectives.

Personally, I have my own viewpoints in certain areas of my field. While I may not have original insights on everything, I certainly have developed my own thought processes for some lectures. My PhD experience helped me build those perspectives, allowing me to contribute more than just textbook knowledge. It gave me the time and opportunity to integrate different resources and examples, and to shape my own understanding of the subject.

Strategic management, by its nature, holds a unique place in industry and is often viewed as a more niche and refined discipline, especially when it comes to execution. With the rise of artificial intelligence, there is a growing concern that AI might replace strategic management, regardless of the skills of future professionals. What is your view on this?

There are two perspectives here. Either AI will take over the entire industry, or it will act as a supportive tool for professionals, particularly in analysis. I remember during my MBA and PhD, many students were fascinated by strategic frameworks. In 2009 or 2010, some students even asked me to teach "50 frameworks in strategic management." But I believe that approach is becoming less relevant. Even if frameworks remain useful, they need to be applied thoughtfully, not just taught as abstract concepts. It's not about throwing jargon at students and expecting results.

Professionals who can bridge traditional strategic models with AI will be highly sought-after



Effective strategies come from lived experiences and practical knowledge built over time

Often, students carry this jargon into the workplace, but without context, these frameworks lose significance. In my view, the context in which strategies are developed is far more critical. Effective strategies come from lived experiences and practical knowledge built over time.

As for AI, I see it as an enabler. It won't replace strategic management but will complement it by accelerating the thinking process. Many traditionally-run companies are now moving towards AI-powered models, blending the old with the new.

Professionals who can bridge traditional models with AI will be highly sought after. Rather than making strategic management obsolete, AI will collaborate with it, creating a fusion of skills. This hybrid approach is the future.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, professionals who can integrate traditional strategies with AI will be crucial for companies transitioning to new models. While a small percentage of companies in India have already begun this journey, most will follow in the next five years. We are heading towards a convergence of traditional management practices with AI-driven innovations.

With over 20 years of experience in academics and as a new faculty at XLRI-Delhi-NCR, what are your expectations from MBA students today? Given how the market has evolved and become more challenging, what key qualities should students develop to succeed?
My main expectation from MBA students is that they retain their individuality. Often, during the course of their studies, students feel pressured by peers or the demands of MBA culture, which can lead them to lose sight of who they are. It's essential that students stay true to themselves and make their own decisions, rather than conforming to external expectations.

Our role as an institution isn't just to prepare managers who can be absorbed by the industry, but to develop leaders who will challenge the status quo and initiate change. A strong individual respects others while thinking independently and critically. Technical, behavioural, and managerial skills are important, but they must be built on a foundation of self-awareness and individuality.

Students should be prepared to question established practices and not be swayed by external pressures. Management requires a broad understanding — you can't compartmentalise knowledge. It's about handling both the concrete and the abstract, and this ability comes from having a strong sense of self.

That's the kind of manager we aim to develop — someone driven by inner strength and self-direction, not by the pressures of the industry or their peers.

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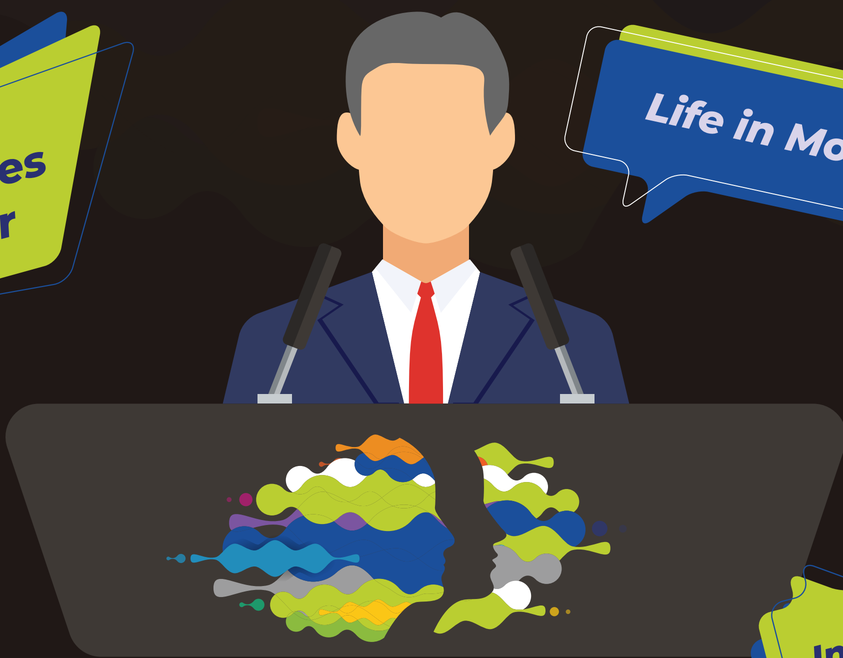

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CEO LOUNGE

WORK REWIRED

Corporate leaders and academicians convened in Kolkata to dissect the evolving dynamics of modern business for the monthly Xplore roundtable. From balancing profit with purpose to the shifting employment landscape, the conversations offered an unvarnished view into the future of leadership and work.

A select gathering of CxOs and academicians joined forces for a roundtable in Kolkata, tackling some of today's most pressing business challenges. The discussions spanned critical themes, providing insights into how companies can navigate the ever-changing market realities.

Profit, Purpose, and the Shift Toward Ethical Capitalism

The participants explored the delicate balance between profit and purpose in a world where consumers demand more than just financial success. They debated the nuances of ethical capitalism, weighing the opportunities and risks of integrating purpose-driven initiatives with profit goals, aiming to align business objectives with societal expectations.

Brand Authenticity: The Ultimate Differentiator in a Distrusting World

In a time when consumer trust teeters on a knife's edge, authenticity has become a game-changer. The discussion examined the high stakes of genuine brand communication, how transparency can forge stronger bonds with consumers, and the dangers that lurk for brands that fail to stay true to their values.

Attendees:
Rishav Dev, Century Ply; **Debasish Sen**, HIDCO (former IAS officer); **Pankaj Gupta**, Ratnabali Investments; **Vijay Jacob**, VML; **Muthar Basha**, Eveready; **Saurabh Jajodia**, Keventer; **Debraj Roy**, Lux Industries; **Deepak Bahera**, Exide; **George Thomas**, MSP Steel; **Sanku Bose**, Techno India Group; **Shruti Swaika**, Fox & Mandal; **Indroneel Goho**, Magpet Polymers

The Power of Leading from Behind Through Invisible Leadership
Shining the spotlight on others while guiding from behind—this subtle leadership style was at the heart of the conversation. The speakers dissected how invisible leadership can transform team dynamics, fueling innovation and ownership. They explored the fine line between influence and control, and how this approach can reshape organizational culture.

Gig Economy Revolution and Rethinking of Employment in the Digital Age
The rise of the gig economy has rewritten the rules of work, and the roundtable's deep dive into this trend left no stone unturned. They weighed the gig economy's potential to redefine employment models against the uncertainties it introduces, discussing how both businesses and workers can adapt to this new world order.

The Kolkata roundtable served as a vital platform for leaders to grapple with the realities of today's business environment. As these critical dialogues continue, such initiatives pave the way for future-ready strategies that balance innovation, authenticity, and purpose.

Disrupt or Be Disrupted: Inspiring Stories of Change

In a world where innovation reigns, industry disruptors are rewriting the rules. Dive into their success stories and uncover the traits that spark transformation

by Twinkle Sharma

In order to survive and remain relevant in the market, businesses must constantly evolve. They need to understand the ever-changing demands and expectations of customers. Innovations in business models enable corporates to drive growth. A truly successful innovation in a business model can disrupt the market.

This article will explore some success stories of industry disruptors, the importance of such disruption in the current market space, and, towards the end, analyse the common traits shared by industry disruptors.

One of the critical reasons why disruption is so essential is because it shapes or drives the behaviour of the market and the consumer. It supplants the traditional way of things and, on a fundamental level, changes how a market or an industry operates. Disruption can be caused by changing technology, market trends, consumer needs, or any factor that challenges existing

norms and requires businesses to innovate.

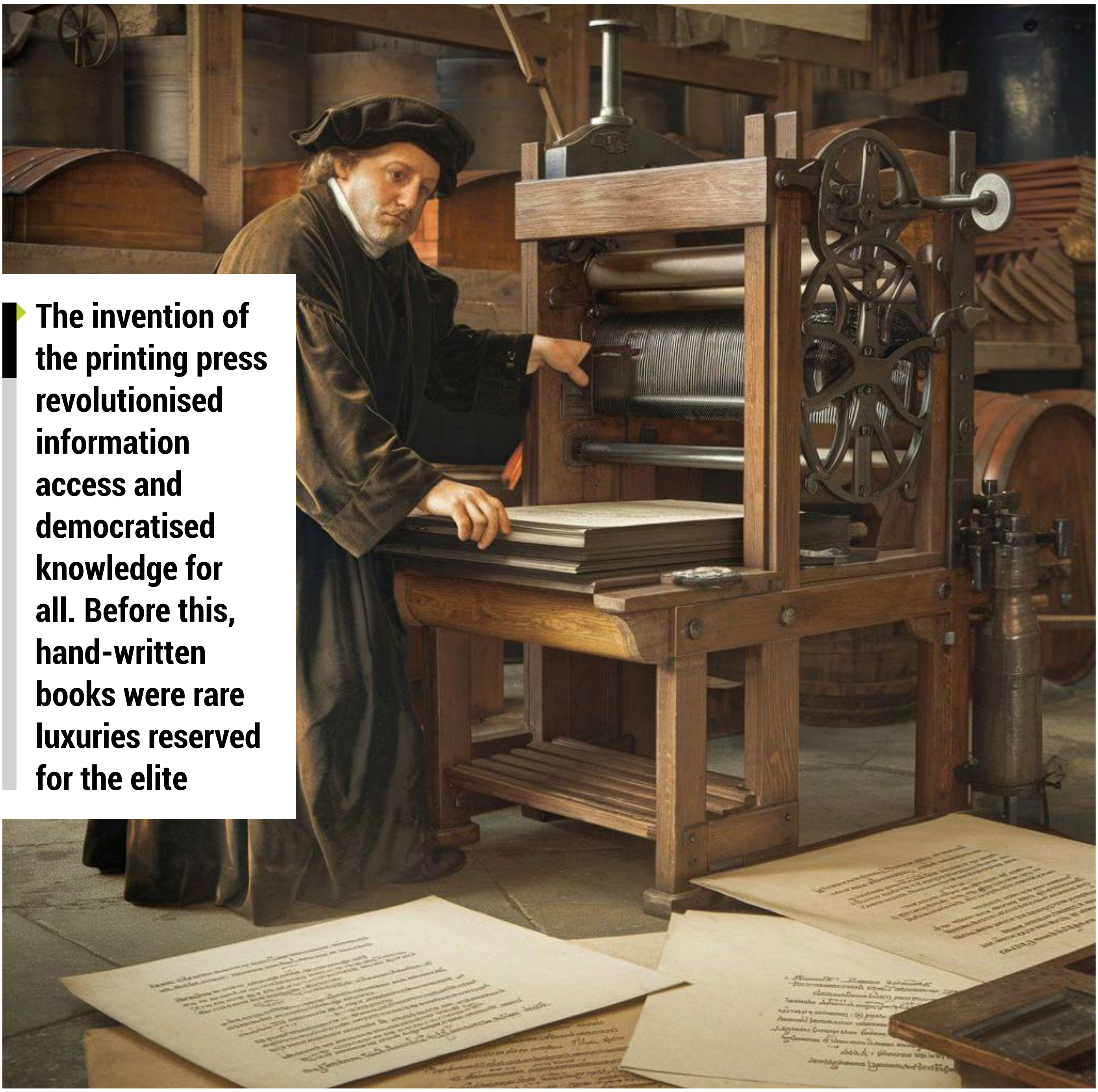
Print Power

The earliest example of industry disruption one can think of is perhaps the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century. Before this, books were written by hand, and only a few copies were made available. This made books a rare commodity, a luxury afforded only by the elite. As a result, education and information were limited to a few. The invention of the printing press led to the mass production of books, making information accessible to a broader audience. It fundamentally transformed the production and consumption of information and laid the foundation for the information age.

Zoom Boom

A recent example of industry disruption comes from the communication technology industry, exemplified by Zoom. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom was just one of many video conferencing apps, and traditional business meetings took place in offices with in-person attendance. Other applications existed, but none were industry giants.

During the pandemic, widespread global lockdowns forced people to transition to remote work and virtual learning. Zoom quickly became the go-to application, not only for business but for virtual learning and community activities. Even after the pandemic,



The invention of the printing press revolutionised information access and democratised knowledge for all. Before this, hand-written books were rare luxuries reserved for the elite

Zoom remains widely used and relevant, positioning itself as a major player in future innovations in work and communication.

Zoom quickly became the go-to application during the pandemic, transforming how we work and communicate in a world that prioritises virtual connections

Cashless Leap

In the Indian context, digital payment platforms provide another example of industry disruption. Before demonetisation, cash was the traditional method of making payments. After demonetisation, platforms like Paytm, GPay, and PhonePe gained attention and attracted users. The adoption of these platforms grew, and with the onset of COVID-19, concerns about disease transmission led to an increased demand for contactless payments.

The shift towards digital payments accelerated, and government initiatives like Digital India paved the way for a cashless economy. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) also played a key role in promoting this shift. Today, almost everyone in India, even in remote areas, uses UPI or some form of digital payment.

EVs Take Charge

Electric vehicles (EVs) are currently disrupting the automotive sector. With constant innovation and technological advancements, EVs are gaining popularity. Though they represent a small fraction of the market, their adoption is growing rapidly. Government initiatives and environmental regulations have accelerated the shift from traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to EVs. This innovation has significantly disrupted the automotive industry, as consumers become more aware of environmental issues and seek sustainable solutions.

As observed from the examples above, industry disruptions lead to far-reaching changes for businesses and society. Some of these changes include improved customer experience, market transformation, economic growth, cultural and social changes, technological advancements, and globalisation.

Disruptive Traits

Given the importance of industry disruption for business innovation and survival, aspiring business leaders must understand the common traits of successful disruptors. This knowledge can offer valuable insights and guidance for navigating future market trends.

A few common traits from the success stories shared above are:

- **Innovation:** These businesses introduce groundbreaking processes and methods that challenge existing norms.
- **Accessibility:** They create a level playing field by making products and services accessible to a wider audience.
- **Adaptability:** They modify their business strategies in response to changing market trends and customer demands.
- **Impact:** They transform the market space and influence consumer behaviour for years to come.

In conclusion, industry disruptors bring about transformation. Understanding their strategies offers valuable insights to aspiring leaders as they navigate future market trends.

Twinkle Sharma
is a first-year PGD(HRM) student at XLRI, Jamshedpur

Rethinking Hierarchy: Fostering Agility through Holacracy

As traditional structures falter amid rapid change and uncertainty, embracing holacracy can empower organisations to cultivate agility and adaptability in a complex landscape

by Kanak Bansal

> *"It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change"*
>
> — Charles Darwin

In today's world, often characterised by terms like VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) and BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible), organisations face unprecedented challenges that demand greater resilience, adaptability, and responsiveness. Traditional hierarchical structures, with rigid chains of command and fixed roles, look increasingly inadequate. As companies strive for greater agility and employee empowerment, innovative organisational models like *holacracy* are emerging.

Holacracy: Breaking Free from Hierarchy

Developed by Brian Robertson, holacracy is a decentralised structure that emphasises self-management, distributed authority, and clear roles and responsibilities. Holacracy starkly contrasts with traditional organisational designs. Its goal is to create an organisation based on simple rules for recognising, articulating, and creating the tasks that need to be accomplished, and then giving people the authority to adapt their professional roles to these new tasks at their own discretion. In holacracy, work is organised around common tasks or projects rather than fixed job titles. There are no traditional job titles — only roles — and no managers. Instead, authority is distributed throughout the organisation.

Work is organised by groups of employees, referred to as "circles," which form and disband as required based on the tasks at hand. These circles follow detailed procedures regarding decision-making and meeting operations. Holacracy seeks to increase transparency and reduce decision-making time by making three key changes to the organisation:

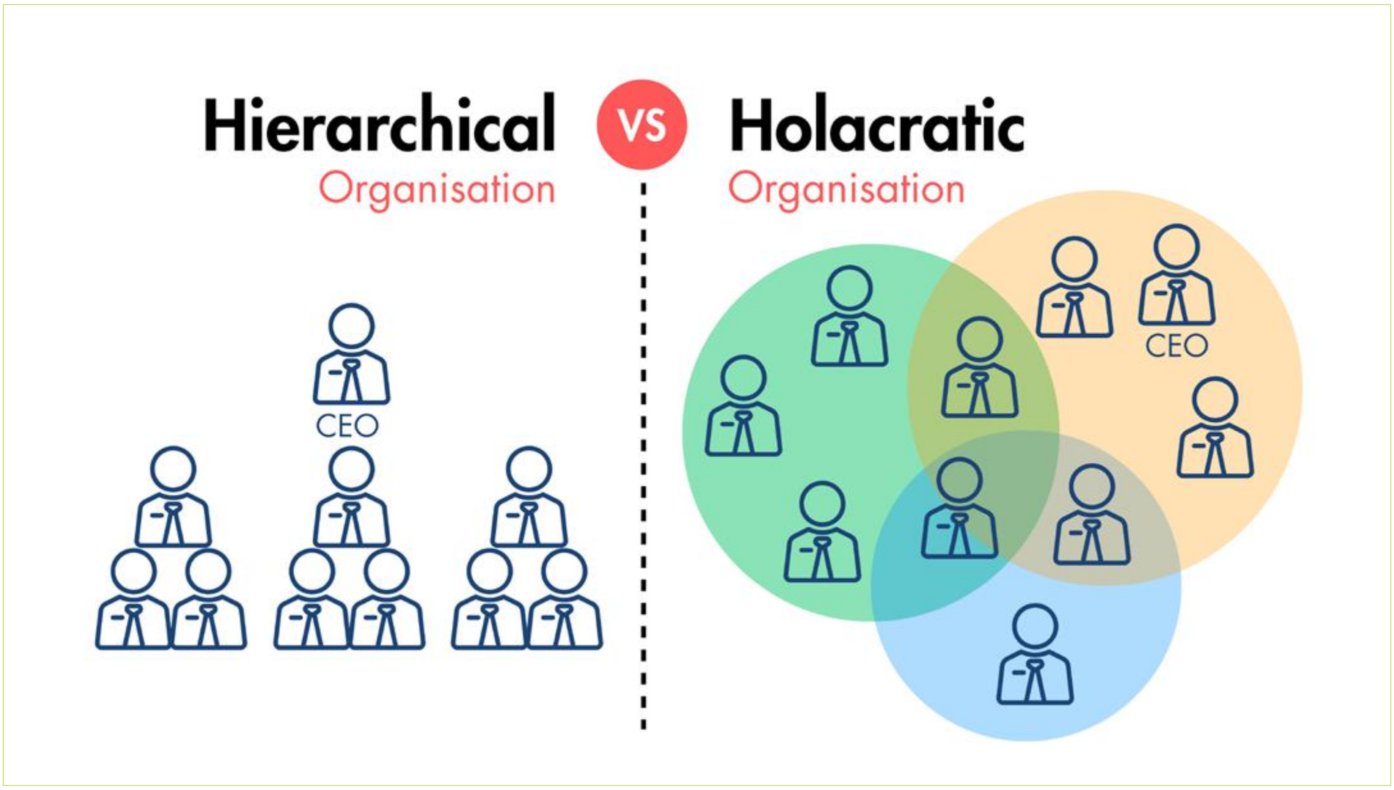
1. It organises work into roles,
2. It associates specific accountabilities with those roles, and
3. It gives each role-holder complete authority to make the necessary decisions.

Traditional hierarchies can encourage inefficiencies and undesirable behaviours among both management and employees, such as excessive delays and power imbalances. Holacracy aims to eliminate these outcomes by fostering a more responsive and responsible organisational environment.

Case Studies: Mixed Outcomes

- Zappos, under CEO Tony Hsieh, adopted holacracy in 2014. Initially, this approach aligned with Zappos' strong culture of innovation and fostered creativity. However, the transition faced significant challenges. By 2015, about 14 per cent of Zappos employees left the company, citing difficulties with the unstructured environment and lack of clarity in roles. Over time, the company experienced confusion in decision-making, with some employees struggling to adapt to the decentralised system. Despite these issues, Zappos continued to refine its use of holacracy, focusing on cultural fit and gradual adjustments.
- Oticon, under CEO Lars Kolind in the

Traditional hierarchical structures are increasingly inadequate as organisations strive for agility and employee empowerment in a rapidly changing environment



Holacracy fosters a responsive organisational environment by eliminating inefficiencies and undesirable behaviours common in traditional hierarchies

1990s, implemented the "spaghetti organisation," a structure similar to holacracy, where traditional hierarchies were dismantled, and employees formed flexible, cross-functional teams. Between 1991 and 1996, revenues doubled, and profits increased significantly. However, by the early 2000s, challenges surfaced. The lack of clear structure led to confusion and inefficiencies. Oticon eventually reintroduced some hierarchical elements to improve scalability and accountability, balancing flexibility with structure.

- iQmetrix's transition to holacracy in 2015 was led by CEO Christopher Krywulak. However, after implementing holacracy, around 30 per cent of the workforce struggled with the ambiguity around roles and responsibilities. Many employees found the decision-making process confusing and less efficient, leading to delays. To counteract these issues, the company adapted by incorporating traditional management structures alongside holacratic principles. This hybrid approach allowed iQmetrix to maintain some of the agility and flexibility that holacracy initially brought, while reintroducing clearer role definitions and accountability.

Flexibility for a Resilient Future

Despite challenges, organisations may find promise in the potential benefits of holacracy. Businesses that overcome early obstacles and foster a flexible culture can reap the benefits of holacracy, including increased flexibility and employee empowerment. This will equip them to succeed in a market that moves quickly.

Future and current leaders must comprehend holacracy as well as other innovative organisational concepts. When the corporate environment shifts, leaders need to be prepared to explore and implement these strategies.

Kanak Bansal
is a second-year PGD(HRM) student at XLRI Jamshedpur.

" Cultural Fit is the Cornerstone of Talent Acquisition in Today's Market "

In the ever-evolving landscape of talent acquisition, **Ajay Kumar**, Co-Founder and Global Head of People and Enablers at Thoucentric, underscores the critical role of cultural fit in building successful teams. In a thought-provoking discussion with *Karan Goyal*, Ajay shares insights on the challenges of attracting the right talent amid fierce competition and emphasises the importance of emotional intelligence in HR leadership. He also discusses innovative approaches to fostering a cohesive workplace culture that nurtures both employee growth and organisational success.

You were one of the co-founders of Thoucentric and have witnessed its growth from zero to over 500 employees. How have employee policies and procedures evolved over time? Was the employee-first strategy always part of Thoucentric's ethos, or was there a pivotal moment that led to its adoption?

I'll address whether the employee-centric approach was our starting point. The answer is yes; that was how we wanted to design it. The name itself resonates with that — Thoucentric means 'centred around you,' and we consider the 'you' to be either the employee or the client.

We wanted to keep both the employee and the client at the centre of our universe, with everything revolving around that. The experience we aim to provide for both employees and clients is very similar. We seek to offer a differential experience compared to any other company they've worked with, whether we're talking about employees or clients.

When we initially started, I was the fourth employee to join, and now we have over 500. Our growth has been driven by understanding what we need and how to process or structure the company. In the beginning, there were no structures, processes, or policies. The first group of people who joined us were those we knew through our first or second connections on LinkedIn. We practically knew everyone who joined, and they came on board for a specific reason. Each person had a project in mind, so it was the project that came first, and we identified who should work on that project.

These individuals believed in us because of the credibility of the initial team we formed. They were stalwarts in their respective business categories, and their credibility attracted others to join us. They started on their specific client projects, and everything ran smoothly. We never felt the need for employee policies, processes, or governance because these individuals were experts in their fields.

After we crossed 50 employees and began hiring from the market and campuses, bringing in people with whom we didn't have direct connections, we realised we needed some kind of structure. From the beginning, we were clear that we didn't want a conventional, traditional HR setup. Credit goes to our founder, Elakshi, who envisioned a more philosophical, utopian structure driven by introspection.

We believe that if you have a company with 100 or 1,000 employees who know exactly who they are and what they can do, there's no need for much governance. If someone can introspect and understand their strengths and areas for improvement, they can focus on what they're good at. We've structured our framework around this belief: employees should focus on their strengths rather than trying to fix their weaknesses.

With that thought, we formed our HR policies and procedures. Of course, we must adhere to statutory and compliance requirements, but when it comes to how people behave and interact within the organisation, it's quite different from most companies I've known. That was a deliberate decision.

What I take away is that Thoucentric has a horizontal structure that gives liberty to its people. Moving on to the next question, HR is primarily a people enabler in any company. How do you see the integration of HR with non-HR functions evolving in the next five years within Thoucentric?

I think, in general, the success of whatever culture we drive through the HR team depends on how well the other departments align with that vision. If I want to drive a particular culture or a specific way of working in the company, the rest of the organisation must be completely aligned with that thought process. If that doesn't happen, whatever we advocate as culture will never take root.

At Thoucentric, there's a central body called 'Neon' that oversees the company culture. It's called Neon because neon is an inert gas — it doesn't take on the characteristics of anything it comes into contact with. So, it's a very unbiased system that doesn't fall under any particular practice. It reports directly to us, and they always act as a neutral entity. The policies and anything related to employee experience are driven by the Neon team, which applies to everyone — from leadership to the employee who just joined an hour ago. Everyone is expected to follow that same structure and way of working, or consulting, however you want to call it.

That's the only way to build a culture in a company. Without culture, I don't think there is a company. You can have skills and many proficient individuals, but without culture, there's nothing that unites them. Without that unity, I don't think any company can survive in the long run.

What's extremely important for any company's success is how they are able to propagate the culture and instil that culture in every individual who joins the company. That culture should resonate with at least 70-75 per cent of the people in the organisation. You'll never achieve 100 per cent alignment, but if 70-75 per cent of the people are aligned, the company will function uniformly, and everyone will feel that there is a unique style and way of working at Thoucentric that's slightly different from other companies they've worked with.

I think that's how the HR function has to build, create, and propagate the culture across all other non-HR functions. In fact, I wouldn't even label any function as non-HR because, as long as these functions deal with people,

Emotional intelligence is key for HR professionals to create a supportive environment that nurtures talent across all functions

it's all the same — it's all part of the same culture-building process. They may have different core competencies or primary priorities, but without people and ensuring the people experience, no function will exist.

I'd like to explore how you maintain relationships with employees, particularly regarding diversity and inclusion. Given your offices in India and abroad, how do you ensure that diversity and inclusion initiatives are embraced and implemented across all departments, rather than just being HR-driven?
We primarily believe that it's the talent we are acquiring that matters. Talent has no gender, community, state, or any other characteristics associated with it. When I refer to talent, it can be anyone — he, she, or non-binary. To me, or to us, it's all the same, as long as the person can deliver, has the right skill set for the job, and is a cultural fit. That's what we believe in — talent is just talent. There are no additional caveats. We believe that's how a company grows.

Now, when it comes to the DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), I would say it's a journey a company has to embark on. Not everyone is comfortable understanding the complexities of DEI, especially regarding the LGBTQIA+ community. Even though it has always existed, the way it's clearly defined now is relatively recent. Many people are still learning what each of these categories means, how they differ, and why it matters.

That's why I come back to the same point: we view talent as talent alone. There's no other caveat. Regardless of the group they belong to, if a person is good enough for the role and is a culture fit, it's a perfect match.

We've started focusing on cultural variance over the last six months by conducting training sessions to educate employees about different communities. While we've never rejected anyone based on their community, we aim to

Finding candidates who fit our culture is tough; we need self-motivated individuals who resonate with our flat, philosophically-driven organisation

identify those who can be trained for the consulting space.

Recently, we added categories beyond male and female in our recruitment system to prevent discrimination. These changes are helping create an inclusive environment, ensuring that individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community feel welcomed.

That's a forward-looking approach, as you can't wait to change policies or educate employees after someone's joined. Training has to happen beforehand, right?

Exactly, it's a journey. Not everyone will instantly accept these changes, not because they dislike anyone, but because they might not have worked with such diversity before. That's why we ensure the company is ready before implementing anything, so people can naturally accept everyone.

Real engagement happens face-to-face through conversations and shared experiences; social media should be an addition, not the core of our culture

Since HR plays a crucial role in building the right talent pipeline, what leadership qualities do you look for in your HR employees who can scale up the ladder?

Since our HR team — Neon — is small, with just three to four people supporting 500 employees, we are meticulous in choosing the right people. The three main leadership qualities we focus on are:

1. Emotional intelligence: This is key. HR professionals need to understand and empathise with employees across the company. High emotional intelligence helps them create a cohesive, supportive environment that nurtures talent across all functions.
2. Strategic vision: Especially for our Neon and talent acquisition (TA) teams, it's essential that HR aligns its strategy with business needs. If we're expanding into new industries or geographies, the TA team must anticipate and prepare for these changes. In consulting, where we handle diverse areas like finance, supply chain, and project management, foresight is critical for success.
3. Influential leadership: HR must communicate clearly and persuasively across the organisation, often dealing with 500 people with different needs and characteristics. Good leaders are strong listeners, able to adapt their communication to foster understanding and cooperation.

While HR functions also depend

on data-driven insights — like turnover and attrition rates — the core qualities we look for in HR leaders are emotional intelligence, strategic vision, and the ability to influence and lead effectively.

I completely agree that emotional intelligence is essential, especially in consulting. I'd love to understand how you're developing it. While you might recruit people with natural emotional intelligence, how do you build on it?
Great question. It's tough to coach someone into emotional intelligence, so hiring people who already excel in it is crucial. But we also run several programmes, specifically in our HR segment, to nurture self-awareness and introspection. We have our "Wizard Training Programme" and the "Introspection Framework Training Programme," both aimed at helping employees reflect on their strengths and shape their careers.

One of our practices is the "Journey Sheet." Every March, employees document their experiences over the past year — the highs, lows, goals met or missed. Initially, there was hesitation, with people wondering if management would read it, but we clarified it's purely for personal reflection. It prompts them to review their year and recognise areas for growth. These kinds of activities help, and over time, we've seen positive feedback from both employees and clients. It's still evolving, but we believe we're heading in the right direction.

How do you see platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and the metaverse playing into engagement and company culture? Especially as Millennials and Gen Z are deeply engaged with these platforms.
Social media is helpful but more as an addition than a core engagement tool. Real engagement happens face-to-face — through conversations, events, and shared experiences. Platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) help us showcase our culture externally. They're essential for brand building and attracting talent, letting the outside world see what we're about. When someone outside is deciding whether to join Thoucentric versus a Big Four or any other company, these differentiators become important. Social media gives potential hires a glimpse of our culture, which can help set us apart from larger firms.

Let's talk about talent management. What do you think is the biggest challenge you or the industry face in this area? And what are some solutions

AI-driven résumé screening will improve, but talent acquisition will always require human intervention; technology can't replace the need for personal connection

The challenge of attracting the right talent persists, especially as the demand for specific skill sets grows amid intense competition

or approaches you're using?
There are a couple of challenges in talent management, particularly in my industry. One major issue is finding the right candidate with the right skill set and cultural fit, which is becoming harder. For example, in the supply chain planning function, if there are 100 skilled people in the market, there are probably 100 companies hunting for those same 100 individuals.

Finding someone who fits our culture is particularly tough. As we discussed earlier, we follow a flat, philosophically-driven organisation, so we need people who are self-motivated and driven from within. Sometimes, we have to compromise due to demand, but we focus on finding candidates who match both our skills and culture requirements.

Another major challenge is the joiner ratio. We find, interview, and select people, but over 20 per cent in certain functions don't join. This stems from the intense competition for the same skill sets. In lateral hiring, it's especially tough, but with campus hiring, once you build trust with a campus, hiring becomes easier year after year. That's why we invest time in campus hiring and choose the right institutions that offer specific courses and skills we need.

Lateral hiring remains a challenge due to competition. Once someone commits to joining us, things go smoothly, and we don't face many issues thereafter. The real challenge lies in finding the right candidates and getting them to join.

When you talk about cultural fit, how do you gauge whether someone will fit in? One obvious method could be

psychometric tests. Are there other approaches you use?
We initially used psychometric tests but realised that they rely on the person being honest with themselves to get accurate results. In recent years, we've trained our recruiters to assess cultural fit during interactions. The decision is left to the recruiters, and we trust their judgment.

Most of the time, we've been right, though we've made mistakes occasionally. The problem with such errors is that the person may later realise it's not the right company for them, and they part ways, which is fine. If someone isn't enjoying the work, there's no point in retaining them. But that's a small minority, and overall, we've managed to bring in the right people.

Let's now turn to the future of HR. Looking ahead to 2030 or 2035, what challenges do you foresee, and how do you think human resource management will evolve by then?
I believe the challenges will remain largely the same. The issue of finding the right candidates and getting them to join has been around for a long time. It's just that now, with the increasing complexity of industries and skill sets, it's getting harder.

A second challenge is the rapidly changing technology landscape, making it difficult for people to upskill every year. The pool of people with the right skill sets is shrinking, while the number of companies seeking those skills is growing. This imbalance is likely to persist, if not worsen. However, universities are adjusting their curriculums to align with market needs, which wasn't the case a decade ago.

Now, many institutions focus on analytics-driven programmes, which are in high demand. As more colleges adapt, the talent pool will expand, which should help. But the challenge of finding the right people will always exist, and competition for talent will remain fierce.

Looking ahead, AI-driven résumé screening will become more advanced. While it's not truly AI — there's no real intelligence — it's about training systems to identify key parameters. These algorithms will improve and help recruiters at the initial screening stage, allowing them to focus on the next set of candidates.

We already use such systems, and while they help, they aren't perfect. I believe they'll get better over time. But talent acquisition will remain people-driven. No matter how much AI and automation are introduced, human intervention will always be crucial.

Before we wrap up, I have an open-ended question: What three tips would you give to aspiring leaders looking to make a significant impact in any organisation?
First, be a leader in every sense. Leading people is expected at a senior level, and many will look up to you. The way you work influences how others work, so being the right kind of leader is essential.

Second, influence is key. Being a good leader helps, but being influential is crucial because you need people to resonate with your ideas and trust your judgment.

Lastly, emotional intelligence is vital. You're dealing with people who have different behaviours and characteristics. Understanding and empathising with them makes a big difference. It helps them trust you and feel comfortable, which is important.

These qualities make a good leader, or at least a decent one.

I recently read an article by Srikanth, the co-founder of Fractal. He discussed the 70-hour work week Narayana Murthy proposed, and how we should look at the industry as a whole.

In the 1970s, a 70-hour work week was common, as nations were trying to grow economically. Today, we've moved to a 40-hour work week. Srikanth explained that people succeed through extreme hard work, sound decisions, and good fortune. Any combination of these helps a person grow.

The bottom 50 per cent didn't have any of these factors — they didn't work hard, make sound decisions, or have good fortune. The top 50 per cent got one of the factors right, and they lead respectable lives. The top 25 per cent got two factors right, and the top 2 per cent got all three.

Murthy's point is that if you haven't made good decisions or been fortunate, extreme hard work — perhaps even 70 hours a week — is the only way to get ahead.

As a leader, you need to understand your people's aspirations, not just for the company, but for their individual careers. Give them the right guidance to help them succeed. They'll value it for life. Seeing your team members succeed, even at other companies, is the greatest reward for any leader.

"I've never seen a thumb drive travel that fast."

"You like to take it right to the edge, don't you?"

"Don't worry, the expectations are the same as ever ... only completely different."

"He teaches, he researches and he writes."

"As everyone knows, scientists are at their peaks early in their careers ... and Dr. Billy is real early."

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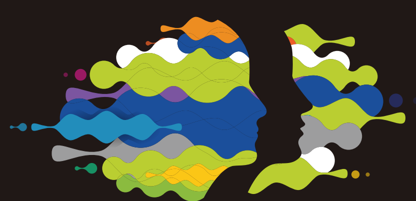

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