

**Host**

Hi Trigya. Hello, and welcome to Mrigashira.

**Trigya Singh**

Hi, Charu. Good to be here.

**Host**

Trigya is passionate about the Sustainable Development Goals, and has been working towards identifying and implementing solutions contributing to the achievement of the SDG 2030 agenda. Let me begin by asking you Trigya, what got you interested in this space?

**Trigya Singh**

Thank you for the question Charu, this is something that is, I think, have been happening with me, in terms of me being introduced to the, the entire spectrum of ESG as, as a young child, who's lived in Jharkhand and Bihar, I have seen very closely how certain brands like Tata bar, Tata Steel, and Aditya Birla group, they sort of work in a very community driven way, where they, wherever they're working, where they have their plants where they're mining, they create this environment where everything is taken care of, in terms of zero harm, zero waste, zero discharge, and that is something I've seen as child as, as an adult also. And this got me interested, I did not know then that I was something called as ESG or metrics or paradigm. But I felt working as a communications person as a person who's also doing digital. I noticed and, you know, that's part of the work that we get a lot of these queries when we are monitoring on social, when they're socially listening, when they're doing analytics. The entire conversation has pivoted towards climate action, and, you know, climate change for the past few years. And thanks, the brands that I've been working with, like Google India, IKEA, and Renew Power, Smart Power India, everybody has been talking about, achieving net zero. And why is it so important, and not just from a cosmetic standpoint, but also through initiatives and actions. So, I would say that, in a way the universe conspired me to get here. And ever since I've been here in this in this sector spectrum, I have been reading up, researching, using the techniques in my communications on a daily basis and that's why I'm interested.

**Host**

That's really interesting and I think I remember reading somewhere that, you know, you were really inspired by one of the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit as well, right? Hearing some leaders talking about this. ESG is often misunderstood to be CSR, or even sustainability, or just restricted to this, how can we explain ESG in like, really simplistic terms?

**Trigya Singh**

Well, they made it very simple by calling it ESG. So E stands for environmental, S stands for social. And G stands for governance. To make it even simpler environmental is basically all the information that encompasses how a company is exposed to and manages risks and opportunities related to climate change, natural resources scarcity, pollution, waste and other environmental factors. So, sustainability, climate change becomes a natural part of it. When you talk about social, it's a component that includes information about the company's values and business relationships, for example, social topics that you know, sort of fall under labor and supply chain standards, employee health, community health, safety, product quality, data privacy and data security. And of course, diversity and inclusion come under Social. When I say governance, now we don't typically relate private sector or basically brands to governance, right, we think that it's the responsibility of the government, the government that we're working on, so we're sort of living under right. But actually, it's an ecosystem. wherein there is it's imperative for the governments to form partnerships with private players or public sector players. And under that, you have subjects like executive compensation, Board of Directors, policies and lobbying, political contributions, bribery and

corruption. All these three factors are measured on sort of a in a period of time, let's see, quarterly, you know, in like a yearly basis, and there is scoring that's given to companies. Typically, it's always been thought that, you know, ESG is something that's related to investment. And you know, of companies that are compliant are good bet in terms of investing in the stocks. But what is happening now, and it's been happening for the past almost six, seven years, at least globally, is there's a shift. Communications plays a very important role, people within the company, the leadership, and the communities where they work in are now all being cognizant of the fact that the entity, the private player, or the public player, is ESG compliant. So ESG is not just CSR, it's not just sustainability. It's not just governance, it's not just good practices. It's everything. And the reason why it's important is because it obviously reduces risk in terms of investment, yes, but also in terms of having an entity that is looking after the community, whether the entity is good enough or not. That is something which has become a democratic conversation now, people are having that conversation now, which is really important, which means people are understanding it. But there is still a long way to go.

### **Host**

That actually demystifies the whole concept really well ESG and it actually puts things more in perspective. And hopefully, this will do away with some of the myths surrounding the conversations around ESG. In fact, very interestingly, you picked up about the government, I feel, and studies are also showing that governments around the world, and I'm not sure, about India and I think India is still lagging behind. Governments around the world have woken up to the concept, and they're doing their bit in bits and pieces, and they have indicated, especially now, you know, that they want to build back better by boosting the economy, while also addressing social issues so that includes climate change. So, so yes, you're right, people still have a long way to go to understand the whole conversation, the whole narrative around ESG.

So, this brings me to the point that what effective ESG strategies do communicators need to adapt to you would advise them as someone who's been working in this space, who understands this space, and probably the first person working in an agency really has learned the ropes, what would you advise communicators who are interesting, interested in this subject and want to really learn further, and obviously come up with a, you know, some interesting things for their clients?

### **Trigya Singh**

So, okay, there isn't one way to look at this, but I'll start with the basic, every communicator these days, or some, I would say years has been you have a messaging framework, you begin there, that's literally the DNA of all your communication, outreach, initiatives and planning, you include ESG, in at that stage, when I say it's a messaging architecture, think of it like a pyramid, right. In a pyramid, you have all these different levels, right. You begin with the simplest and easy level, which is, you know, more easy to understand for everybody that is Environment and Climate conservation. You talk about initiatives that your brand, or your prospect is going to talk about should be talking about, you mould, all your PR, and your social initiatives, you know, online, offline both and your campaigns accordingly and you build them around environmental climate conservation topics, under which of course, you talk about how the market is aligning, you look at how KOL's, key opinion leaders are talking about, you are cognizant of the fact that you're not just an individual in that system, but you're also forming a chain in terms of communication. So, let's say from a simplistic point of view, if there's a tweet thread that's going on, if there is a topical thread that's going on ESG or let's say net zero ladder back to environmental carbon conservation, you latch on that. You talk about what are you doing in terms of that? What it does, it has a ripple effect.

### **Host-Right**

### **Trigya Singh**

and it Yeah, and it actually helps you further the conversation. The second layer or part of the pyramid that you can have is called fair balanced development. Now, because you're a player in the ecosystem, you're not just an individual who's just talking about, just talk about what you're doing. You also have to be cognizant about what your employees, your community where you're working, the host, a state government or the central government is talking, and how are you aligning with those ideas. Now, to give you an example, a couple of months back, Niti Ayog came out with the India 75 charter. Everybody's almost read that, but very few people have come out and understood that it is built around ESG principles. And all the three things that I spoke about earlier are a part of it. So, when private partners or entities start aligning to that in their campaigns, again, would make more sense. And would, you know, it wouldn't bombard people and wouldn't confuse them. So, if you do it in a stage wise thing, it'll be very easy. The third thing you can add to your communication pillar, a pyramid is talking about transparency and human rights. Again, talk, the conversation should be around how you're building trust, creating dialogues, how is skilling, not just your own workforce, but the workforce around the community where you're working? How are you forging partnerships, and how is that good for you, and the environment and the community, and laddering back to the the grassroot level where you're working. And the fourth and the most important and the most topical thing being health and well-being which is typically the bottom of the pyramid. But now given the circumstances, most brands are now inverting the pyramid and talking about that first. Health and well-being in COVID times is extremely important not just for your own health and well-being or just your own employees' health and well-being. But again, you know, something like safety of workers, their family, their surroundings. And if that sort of, you know, is becomes the foundation of your conversation, that also helps people understand that hey, you sure to do good. The best example right now would be just take an example that is like a CRED doing, you know, the implication of their credit points and donating oxygen. Right, that's a great example of that. Look, look at what TATA's are doing, look at what Mahindra is doing, Mahindra has activated, its fleeto vehicles, and is also producing oxygen. And you have the top leadership, the C-suite, constantly being involved in the health and wellbeing conversation. It's all happening for a reason. So, the best and the basic thing is to do when you're mapping your conversation mapping your lead plans have ESG principles right in the front. Start with that, pivot from let's say high volume to high focus, use digital in a timely manner ship alignment of narrative. And of course, ensure that the focus is also on internal communication that's really important. So it's like a more of a multi-pronged strategy.

## **Host**

I really like the way you like, you know actually made me visualize the entire architecture. You've talked a lot about employees, as the employee becomes central to all communication, how can a strong ESG proposition prove to be an enabler for internal comms specifically.

## **Trigya Singh**

So I'll actually give you an example for this. Last year, this is something I was doing really, day in day out as part of my work. So, before COVID hit, because all the regular you know, topical, and marketing promotions on digital and PR, and then eventually when COVID hit and people were like, okay, we're going on a lockdown mode, we're not talking about things, we are keeping quiet. From that within a few weeks, all my brands got activated. One of the brands that you would not think that would be doing ESG communications this aggressively was A) Vedanta and B) Castrol India and Castrol India is an interesting example because typically lubricant brands or brands that are in the automotive space, do not talk about ESG or do not talk about sustainability but they started the conversation by involving the employees in it, we sort of created this entire framework where employees could come in, give the video bytes of the good work, either whether it's either about CSR, whether it's about the daily work they're doing at home to make the environment better, or the relief work that they were doing. And this, you know, made the entire thing very interesting because the social media platforms to the brand became a platform for the employees to speak. Now when you take employees and empower them and tell that hey! you're as, as bigger part of this ESG or

sustainability conversation as we are as a brand it creates a different effect because A) it's more shareable it is shared to more people, more people get educated more people are participating because there's a known face, talking about how they did their real life. That was great. For Vedanta, we started this interesting series about Vedanta heroes, again ladder to CSR, talking about, the relief work they're doing in their communities, they're also doing, people are doing, you know, giving donations, people are distributing food, to not just well, people and humans, but also animals, taking care of the community is not just restricted to the human population. So those stories lend credibility, it also showed that the, the ESG factor, the environment, social governance factor is in the DNA of these organizations. And it's not just something that you do for a mandatory metric measurement, which is engagement and reach.

### **Host**

No, I completely agree. And, and I think you've really explained this well, and then now that you've painted this fantastic picture of what the ESG Communication metrics, and the whole architecture needs to look like, both internal and external, let me come to evaluation measurement. Even the best of programs without measurement, you know, has literally no meaning. So, what would you recommend?

### **Trigya Singh**

The way I look at communications is really simple Charu. Communicators are jobs on a daily basis, there's just two things A) more than impressing express in a way that people understand. And your communication should not be limited only to a certain set of people, which is KOL, right, Key opinion leaders, it should be for everyone, if it's social, it is supposed to be social. And measuring social is easy, because every footprint that you leave on social media is measurable in terms of reach impressions, or engagement, congruence in terms of sentiment. Now, what we did and I've been working on this for past, almost three years is create a framework to which is easy to calculate, marry that framework with typical social or digital listening tactics, there are a lot of tools for that. And the measurement framework is really simple in this term, you have these three pillars, right environmental, social, and governance. Under environment, we have let's say, resource use, emission, emissions innovation, you give scoring, in terms of what is the coverage now, for example, for ESG compliance, all brands have to talk about the impact. They do that through the annual reports, they do that to their different publications and journals, white papers, what not. But the reality is they have to talk about numbers. When you look at the numbers and look at the impact those numbers are having in terms of reach and relevance and resonance and social, you can create a scoring, let's say I give environment 20. I give social 20. I give governance 20, basic scoring. And I also put a benchmark against the best practices, let's say for me, let's say if a Tesla is the best example, and they have a 20 to 20 plus scoring, in general terms speaking, I would benchmark the brand that I'm working with against that. And then obviously include social listening mechanisms to sort of see what they're talking about on social, how is their sentiment going? Is it towards negative, is it more towards positive, is it more towards neutral, and then pivot using the three principles? Now, my in my experimentations in the past few months, what I've seen is the moment you start talking about environmental, social and governance, your scoring automatically goes up if you're, you know, validating with numbers and impact stories or beneficiary stories, like we want to call it, if you're not and you just talking about fluff stuff, which is basically topicalities or you choose sort of flattering to leeching on upon something that says topical, let's say a cop 26. A brand wants to just be a part of the conversation without really talking about how they are actually doing it on ground. It reduces the scoring. So, we also take cognizance of the vanity metrics and the vanity content that comes up from PR and social and give negative scoring accordingly. And that balances the entire scoring, So it all boils down to three things its relevance, resonance and reach, the way you know, in a very simplistic way right.

**Host**

I'm sure it's not as simple but you really make it sound simple. And I would love to see next year, in the PR industry awards, introducing a category on ESG it will be fantastic. So, on that note, thank you so much for talking to us, demystifying the whole concept and explaining it in far more detail and hopefully, we will see lot more communicators dabbling into this space of ESG.

Thank you.

**Trigya Singh**

Thank you, Charu,

Thank you for the opportunity.