

Charu

Hi, Anil, thank you for making the time to join us on Mrigashira.

Anil

Hi, hi, Charu, thank you again, for this invitation, interesting set of questions and our pre discussion. So looking forward to it myself.

Charu

One good thing with the pandemic has been that the conversations are no more around the need for businesses and brands to integrate digital, right? It's now like a given so but we all know how rapidly technology changes, and we have to continuously rethink and adopt new solutions. My first question to you and this perhaps, could be the top most question in every business or brands mind today, how can we reimagine the customer experience using digital?

Anil

Fantastic question and you kind of hit the nail right in the head. When we were growing up, life was much simpler. And there were fewer brands, fewer channels, and fewer opportunities, you know, for customer experience to come to the fore. Not just that, it was a seller's market. At that sense. You had maybe five cars, you had 10 soaps, you had maybe a few channels, X number of distribution outlets and retail outlets, the world is completely been turned on its head today, not only do you have like a huge burgeoning number of retail options that you have from high street to Kirana stores to you know mom and pop stores to destination retail places, you have an equal or if not more number of digital channels as well, you know, right from D2C options that brands have to marketplaces of all different shapes and sizes, horizontals verticals, and you also have then the entire, you know, the same thing being available on various social media channels, and that just kind of explodes, the options and the touchpoints that brands have to maintain today, you know, to keep up with the category and to keep up with competition brands and that brings to for the most important question of customer experience. So customer experiences two parts with one, you know, how do we ensure that, you know, we give the customer the maximum convenience, because the customer has multiple other things to do and your brand or your offering is only one part of his or her entire life and you want that to happen as smoothly as possible, which is quick in quick out with least tension, maximum ease and efficiency and of course, customer delight. So that's one part where the second part of customer experiences it's a state of constant beta, which is you have a great customer experience and your competition has improved the customer experience so you got to keep playing catch up and technology keeps changing, new channels emerge and therefore, unlike earlier where there was a big status quo, when it came to marketing, nothing changed for decades on end, today, every week, every month, every year, there is something new being thrown up, and you constantly have one to be in a state of constant beta and to you know, you have to be alert and on the edge and the third thing is just because somebody else has an X customer experience does not mean that your brand needs to have it. What your brand needs is customer experience that's aligned to your brand and its intrinsic purpose and that again, is you know, it's a very, very tricky space because if you don't do that, then you will constantly be chasing your tail and somebody else's tail and investing time, money and cost. So, the entire this this dimension of customer experience is extremely fascinating.

Charu

You set it by rightly that customer has multiple things to do and that means the role of the communicator needs to be completely agile this actually brings me to my question of How have you been inspiring some of the campaign's you know, you've been working very closely with so tell us two of your most inspiring campaigns - futuristic get iconic.

Anil

I wouldn't call them just campaign shadow because they're more than campaigns, it just so happens that it's, you know, something that communicates between the brand and its customers, but it's not like the campaigns of yours and I want to give you two examples of recent work but which was, which was highly impactful. We all know what the pandemic has done for, you know, obviously, it's kind of taken a huge toll on our society and on our lives and the way you know, we've kind of lived, but the pandemic in, you know, the silver lining in the pandemic cloud has been, it's really accelerated take new technologies and innovations in the world of marketing and commerce, and which I think is going to hold companies in good stead because it's literally forced them to make these investments, it's literally quadrupled, you know, the kind of budgets and lit telescope companies into into the future.

Charu

Right.

Anil

And two two examples that come to mind and these are mostly pandemic examples is one one is on Colgate, where, you know, the pandemic had just started and, and, you know, we were all driven indoors and this is during that entire process where, you know, there was a complete lockdown on people and movement and stuff like that, the first lockdown, and we were just about learning how to, you know, do this entire advertising process from home and during one of our discussions with our clients, we realized that there was a huge pressing problem, which was the problem of people getting access to dentists and, you know, though, dentistry does not come in, in the hierarchy of medical emergencies and therefore, the government that allowed people to kind of travel in the case of medical emergency, I think dentistry didn't fall into that ambit and because of that, and and we also know how bad an oral care problem can be, you know, the pain and the suffering involved and and we as VMLY&R and as Colgate, we felt that we needed to do something about it as India's leading oral care brand and that was when, you know, the client and us immediately sprang into action and literally, within a period of a month, we had put together a platform, which allowed patients to or people with oral care problems to access dentist, it was called dentist for me, and we had to move with real speed on this one, put the technology so it was a platform where, you know, we you know, and it was a time when even dentists didn't have much due because they were they were, they were stuck at home, they couldn't consult or meet their patients and therefore, this was a huge service during the pandemic, we met with a lot of success. It was a telemedicine platform where people could access using voice using video and using technology mainly, you know, and where the algorithm allowed patients and dentists to kind of, find mutual times and consult. So, this was really, really interesting rewarding for the customers working for Colgate Palmolive regard rewarding for us as an agency for free and it continues even

today now that the lockdowns are slowly lifting. The second one was, pre pandemic. Tiktok was still in town and Tiktok was really doing well and we have a brand parachute from medical, no one very, very, like a leading and respected brand. We want to do something with the younger franchise and get onto this entire Tiktok you know, phenomenon. And what we did there was we said, you know, a big part of brand parachute is the entire ritual of champy, which is the age old indian ritual of a head massage. It's more than a head massage in India. It's also, you know, huge in this entire family. The same goes stuff well, you know, you have grandmother's doing it to teach children grandchildren and, and what not. So we said how do we contemporize this and, you know, marry it with a channel like Tiktok. And we figured out that if he were to contemporize, this entire chumpy and tick tock is all about music and activity and dance. So we figured out, you know, we work with musicians and created an entire, like a playlist of, of different innovative ways to do the age old champy, and we put it up on Tiktok and we had no idea how that would kind of go and whether people would adopt it. And lo and behold, it became one of the biggest phenomena on Tiktok, where a huge generation of people who did not have the champy, you know, the culture or, or, or any kind of connection with champy literally got introduced to this in a very, very young, fun and contemporary way, both of these, for me are interesting ways in which traditional brands, strong brands can still, without losing their, their core, you know, values can still leverage new mediums.

Charu

Two fantastic examples the first one it's more about how you created a program, or a campaign which helped solve a consumer problem and second, the parachute oil is more about how you took that whole brand experience with the consumer to the next level. Right? So, I think just straightforward advertising gone are the days and it's really about new technologies and this brings me to the question about artificial intelligence, which is believed to be the biggest opportunity for companies, industries, nations over the next few decades. How can we communicators work with brands to use AI beyond just chatbots? And data analytics?

Anil

Yeah, really interesting question again, Charu? before we answer that, we need to understand what is AI and what's the power of AI in simplistic terms. You know, again, I want to hark back to a time when things were not as complex numbers weren't that huge, things were more open and shut, they were there weren't too many opportunities for interactivity. You know, today, if we were to you know, just do a simple permutation combination of, you know, 6 billion human beings, maybe 10,000 different channels with 400 different ways in which you can engage with the channel, the numbers are mind boggling, and it goes beyond the realm of human beings to be able to plan for a complexity like this and that is where AI steps in. So, AI literally is like computing brain, that can be programmed and you create a set of scenarios, obviously, with the power and speed of the computer computing prowess, you're literally able to, you know, fast forward or put on steroids, what processes or reactions that you know, would have happened if human beings were still controlling it and if you had to add ML to AI, which is machine learning, then you're done you literally you know, exponentially again increasing and you are able to processify cases of sectors where it's really helped is lots of lots of interesting cases. So, in the financial sector, where millions and millions of transactions have to happen and many of them are regular average for example, it could be in banking, it could be in stock picking it could be in you know, the for example, in the stock market where the prices are like literally fluctuating every day

across 1000s of different stocks. You know, it's virtually impossible even if you are like the cleverest human being to be able to catch every trend to predict every, you know, potential outcome but the machine can do it faster and better. I'm not saying only machines can do it. Obviously, you need a great mix of human intuitiveness intelligence because the human beings are the ones that put the algorithm in but then that that combination of man and machine then then makes it really interesting. Another sector where there is huge potential for it is healthcare. Dentist for me is one example. By there are many, many different complex ways that AI is being used for healthcare especially, for example, in areas where it's impossible to see test reports, clinical reports, X ray, CT scans, you know, machines can kind of pick up abnormalities, trends and literally, you know, help save lives, crop science, pharma clinical trials, and these are the areas where I feel that AI is really kicking in is already being used, has met with a lot of success. But but, again, not to say that AI cannot be used in regular marketing as well, today, you know, especially in commerce, where you can, you know, there are 1000s millions and millions of purchases happening in order to be able to kind of understand consumers understand finer nuances, like for example, even in your own family Charu. You know, if you have five or six members in your family, all of them behave differently, though they belong to the same family and maybe have the same behavioral traits. But then there are these micro behaviors that can be captured not by a media plan, not by you know, something like a people meter, but by by, you know, AI algorithms, which we can literally say, Hey, you know, there are n we call it the customer of one, which is, how do we know, if there are 6 billion human beings on this planet, then there are literally 6 million customer cohorts. I don't think anybody's ever reached out, but that should be the ultimate aim is how do we kind of treat each customer customer as the customer of one.

Charu

Right, so if you could see into the future, and I will not take you very far say 2030, what new, unimaginable things you see with the power of digital?

Anil

You know, 2030, may not seem very far, but 2030 from a relative lens can be very far and why I say that is the world is divided. If we go back and look into history, maybe the last three or four decades were the the final saga in the industrial revolution, which started maybe 3-4 hundred years ago. And it brings me to a very interesting story that I heard, it's not a story, it's real. When cars were first invented, there was a piece of legislation called the red flag Act, which basically meant that if you bought a car, you also had to have a person with a red flag running in front of your car and that to be basically not allowed the car run faster than a horse carriage, or people walking, and basically was that that was the, you know, the big, prevalent technology of that time and after that, you know, everything boomed factories, automobiles, transport, airlines and we thought that was everything, you know, we said, Wow, we've seen everything that development has to offer, the last three or four decades where the last part of that development now I believe it's the next phase, the entire digital economy and the digital revolution that has kind of started and we are in the first, right now we are lucky to be in the first 15-20 years of this digital revolution piece that's going on and it's like those early days of the red flag act where you will, and I believe the next 10 years is going to see, like humongous changes still, you know, things settle down. I see a lot of automation, you know, coming into conflict with manual, human labor, you know, and and then it's going to find its spot in terms of a balance between human beings, manual labor and and automation. That is one space where I see humongous changes happening. The other

piece I see is in, you know, in the entire shared computing space, which is blockchain, for example, is a fantastic example of that.

Charu

Right

Anil

Traditionally, we've all been wall gardens, and you know, you still see large wall gardens today in existence, but I don't think that's feasible. You know, these wall gardens will need to start collaborating with each other. If humankind needs to kind of move to the Next level, because, you know, what may still look very complex for us is, you know, we won't be able to get economies of scale, and that can only happen through shared computing through through, you know, sharing of, of data sharing of insight sharing of resources. So that's the second space that I see a lot of change in. The third space I see a lot of change in is the entire, you know, the, we already spoke about it, which is a very, very deep textural understanding, which is marketing at the speed of thought, you know, today, marketing as a function is still outside of us, you know, it's it's, it's something that you learn, and then you take time, and then you create some creatives that, that you, you produce it and then you send it out to the customer, and then you wait for the results and this entire process can take anywhere from a week to two weeks to, you know, while I see in the future, there's going to be a lot of intuitive marketing, which is, for example, an a lot Charu thinks an an lot Charu gets, you know, that's that's, that's, that's, and it's possible, I think the basis of of this is getting constructed, and you will see us tending more and more towards it and last but not least, it's IP that's going to be everywhere media, you know, it's not going to be that you know, you gonna have to drive past a hoarding to see a hoarding, or you're going to sit in front of your television. Anything can be media, you know it your desk can be a media, your wall in front of you can be a media, just air can be a media because your holographic projective technologies, you know, screens, you know, mobile phones may not be square and rectangular anymore, iPads won't may not be stiff, television screens won't be these big blocky pieces that you put on it and and you'd say Anil 2030, I think that's too close, I don't see. But you'd be surprised because I think we are hurtling towards some of these. And you will see more and more of those technologies, even if those technologies take another 10-15 years to perfect, but I see in the next 10 years, a lot of them landing around us.

Charu

That's certainly mind boggling and sounds really exciting. In fact, during our lifetime so far, we've seen so much change, we've come a long way from the time we were growing up to starting to now we've come a long way. Thank you so much for joining us Anil, pleasure speaking with you.

Anil

Charu, absolute pleasure and wish you all the best.