

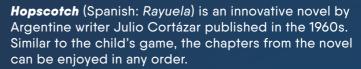


2021
Annual Perspective

MAP OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS



FOREWORD



Hopping, jumping, and going back.

It means an exploration with multiple endings, a neverending search for unanswerable questions. For this year's Annual Perspective, we needed to create an imaginary dialogue among practitioners from all over the world. Although all 20 perspectives were penned without peer input, there is an invisible thread that unites several of the contributions.

So, if you want to discuss the pressing ethical questions that the pandemic has posed to our profession, you might read Averbuj, Goldsworthy, Hückmann, Mantri, Marr, Moriconi, Phillips, and Regazzoni.

Or you might like to dive in the cultural complexities of working in global markets, and read Nugent, Opayemi, and Seah.

For a discussion on trust, you may jump from Crerar to Francis to Herd to Lock to Ovseyevitz.

Finally, for an exploration on the current state of our practice and its digital future, you may read Billiet, De Cozar, Foster Back, and Williamson.

Or, in true Hopscotch spirit, you may jump from one-tothe-other in alphabetical order as we have.

We need to create a meaningful global dialogue on ethics –that is the PRCA Ethics Council's aim. This is the time to reflect on our purpose, our point of view, and the beliefs that underpin our practice.

Enjoy reading and be part of the conversation!



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INTRODUCTION

BY DAVID GALLAGHER FPRCA

PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL CHAIR
PRESIDENT, GROWTH & INTERNATIONAL
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NO SHORTAGE OF ETHICAL CHALLENGES

I don't think we'll face a shortage of ethical challenges as communicators and advisors in 2021, as businesses and governments look to return to a sense of normality as quickly as possible.

Some are obvious: misinformation in its various guises will continue to cloud policymaking and business planning in areas that are truly existential, including climate change and public health.

Others are more subtle, but perhaps more closely linked to day-to-day client briefs –including the temptation to 'purpose wash' brands and organisations as a shortcut to market relevance, which might be irresistible to some (I've written a whole book about this with a colleague, but that's a topic for another day).

And the one that worries me most –at the moment– restoring public confidence in expertise, journalism, and the institutions that guide our shared, public experiences.

We've got our work cut out for us!

GUSTAVO AVERBUJ CMPRCA PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER CEO & REGIONAL DIRECTOR LATIN AMERICA AT KETCHUM

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BACK TO BASICS

We're one year on since remote working replaced office-life and social distancing has become the norm. The arrival of the vaccine has renewed hope and optimism for 2021 but with its arrival comes new and pressing ethical questions that need to be addressed at the highest levels of society and business.

Who should get vaccinated? The old or young, healthcare workers or teachers, nationals or foreigners? Which countries will have access first? Those who can pay? Those who need it the most? Shall we wait for the rushed scientific trials due to the emergency?

Can countries use the vaccines as a political manoeuvre to gain influence? American, British, Russian, Chinese, or Indian vaccines?

Shall we prioritise national health or let economic concerns dominate the agenda?

Are office spaces and seminars, events, and business travel gone forever? How can we accommodate those wanting to come back to the office, those who want to continue working from home, and those who want flexible working?

Even though we always spoke about VUCA (Volatile, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity), the pandemic showed we weren't really prepared to make decisions with this level of uncertainty. Our teams and clients expect us to advise with a strong grasp on where the next trend or disruption is coming from. Many have substantially reduced their real estate (and some no longer have offices). We work with pharma companies battling everyday with enormous amount of pressure from both government and society.

And so, we go back to the very basics of our profession. Creating meaningful dialogues. Listening more than speaking. Articulating policies clearly. Creating strategies. Leading by example (even in uncertain times). Using what we learned in crisis. But more than ever, being just human.

STÉPHANE BILLIET PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER CEO AT WE AGENCY

Stéphane on Twitter

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THE RISE OF INFLUENCER RELATIONS CALLS FOR ETHICS-BASED PRACTICES

The past decade has been a significant tipping point for the evolution of brand and corporate communication strategies. Digital communication has become the real cornerstone of any communication device, bringing out new ethical challenges.

In France, a 1964 decree lays down the principle that the practice of public relations is incompatible with advertising. Hence, earned media and paid media should not be managed by the same practitioners.

However, the growing confusion between e-PR and Influence Marketing is leading PR agencies to move away from this ban at the risk of increasingly frequent ethical issues. To mitigate the risk, SCRP, the French leading professional organisation, has recently taken the initiative of a **Charter of Good Practices** aimed at setting the framework for ethical practices regarding influencers relations.

This Charter was warmly welcomed and adopted by other professional organisations, showing the importance of the issue to all communication advisors.

KARENA CRERAR MPRCA PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER MANAGING DIRECTOR AT EDELMAN SOUTH AFRICA

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INFODEMIC PUTS TRUST TO THE TEST

2021 has seen the arrival of a new kind of threat —an infodemic. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2021 research highlighted that trust in all information sources significantly declined as misinformation spread throughout most of last year. According to this same research, news organisations in South Africa are seen as biased and most South Africans believe that journalists are intentionally trying to mislead them. What will this mean for us as communicators who rely on media channels to tell stories, spread news, information, and insights?

Like many areas of society and industry, communication programming requires a rethink. If we go back to basics, the very definition of communication is to develop meaning for audiences. Navigating one of the most uncertain periods in modern history has changed people's contexts fundamentally, raised levels of anxiety and threatened basic needs, leaving them searching for beacons of leadership and desperate for reliable information. It's no surprise then that 'meaning' now takes on a different connotation, and as communicators, it's our responsibility to ensure that we are part of the solution.

It's no easy task to build back trust but there are certainly steps we can take in the right direction such as understanding the role that institutions play in addressing societal issues and targeting messaging accordingly; developing trustworthy w that is truthful, unbiased, and reliable; and working with trusted media sources in guarding information quality.

To really gain the ear of the listener, we need to be trusted. Only then can we truly start to vaccinate against a prevailing infodemic, which left unchecked could have lasting impact for years to come.

KATIE DE COZAR CMPRCA PRCA TECHNOLOGY GROUP CHAIR HEAD OF ENTERPRISE TECHNOLOGY AT CCGROUP

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TECH AND AI

We're operating in a fascinating time right now. It feels like we've come a really long way from the old school model of economics, where a business' sole purpose was to turn a profit. Capitalism is getting a reboot, and we're seeing genuine social responsibility at the heart of businesses. Conversations are moving away from the bottom line and towards the triple bottom line –profit, people, and the planet.

The tech sector has been no stranger to this movement. But at the same time, ethical discourse has never been more prominent. Al, and the bias that resides within it, has been a huge conversation. Tech players and their product development teams are increasingly under the microscope, as high-profile examples of gender, racial, and sexual orientation bias are regularly hitting the headlines. Whether it's a case of cognitive human bias, or incomplete and insufficient data sets that have caused the problems, these are examples of an industry moving too fast, without the proper level of care and thought.

These negative situations harm the potential of AI for business and society by encouraging mistrust and producing distorted results. Therefore, it's crucial that future AI systems improve on human decision-making. I'm excited to see new technologies emerges to address this –explainable AI is one of them. Majoring on interpretability, it's a feature where a system can explain what it knows, how it knows, and what it's doing. It's evidence-based, which is so important.

But, beyond the technology itself, culture is key. Structural changes around talent need to happen. Product development, engineering, and design teams must become more diverse. Because it is only when the humans that sit within the teams are representative that the decisions become representative.

PHILIPPA FOSTER BACK CBE PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER FORMER DIRECTOR AT THE INSTITUTE FOR BUSINESS ETHICS

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FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE

As many will agree, we all face new ethical issues to contend with in our professional lives. One is about your own behaviour as an individual manager and team leader, whether it be to one person or several or thousands! This revolves around how the adjustment and change is made to the new 'business as usual' which will very likely include a form of hybrid between working at home and in the office.

At one level, all working from home has 'levelled' the office, in online meetings all voices are equal and the opportunity for one person to dominate reduced, it has helped with both the diversity and inclusion agenda in offices, and it has helped us all to get to know each other better.

Communications between teams and across seniorities all have been enhanced to the extent that many have seen productivity and creativity increase.

How can this continue positively in a hybrid situation —will presentism prevail, with those in the office benefitting? Will online/ in office combined meetings work as well? We all remember conference calls with those not there being unable to fully contribute. Managing this all fairly will test us all.

The key to success is two-way communication within the team and with others based on openness, clarity, and defined roles and ways of working.

SIMON FRANCIS CMPRCA PRCA CHARITY & NOT FOR PROFIT GROUP CHAIR, FOUNDER MEMBER OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CAMPAIGN COLLECTIVE



(in) <u>Simon on LinkedIn</u>





Misinformation is not just an issue for those working in high profile areas such as vaccines and the environment. Any campaign can be hijacked by people spreading fake news.

This can turn any campaign into a crisis. We need to be on constant watch for deep fakes and people misrepresenting our views.

First impressions last and it is never easy to unsee content. This means we need to learn lessons from political communicators who are at the forefront of seeing the damage done by false content being seen and how this is rebutted.

It also means that the care-free days of letting your supporters run wild on social media with content could be coming to an end. We need to take the high ground and ensure that we direct supporters to share evidenced and professional content.

We also need to ensure we maintain a duty of care when asking supporters to engage in social media content. The last 12 months has seen a rise in hate speech directed to charity staff and beneficiaries. The work of the Charities Against Hate group has never been more important in working with platform owners, the government, and campaigners to ensure supporters are prepared and supported for this febrile media climate.



SIMON GOLDSWORTHY FPRCA PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER CO-AUTHOR OF PR ETHICS: THE REAL WORLD GUIDE



WHO WOULD YOU WORK FOR?

These days, admittedly with Captain Hindsight at the helm, the fact that some PR pioneers worked for the Nazis is indefensible.

Hitler may be an extreme case, but where does one draw the line today? No government is perfect, but some regimes are surely further from perfection. China in the 2020s seems to be going places -but so did Germany in the 1930s. In both cases, state and business interests were and are hard to disentangle. Interviewed for our new book, a senior insider argued that PR people "don't care if people are persecuted for religious or political beliefs. They don't care that they're not working in a democracy... if there is a dollar sign attached to it, their scruples disappear overnight."

What are the ethical options? With a little effort one could find reasons for not working for anyone -not a very realistic approach. So what tips the scales? There's no magical solution, but at the end of our Real-World Guide we offer a ten-point checklist. Several of the points involve asking yourself -and discussing with others-how you feel about what is proposed, how others (including people outside the PR silo) might see it, and how you would explain it to them. Play devil's advocate -imagine yourself being battered by a social media storm.

Our final point seems particularly relevant: how might what you do look in a year's time -or even five years?

JULES HERD CMPRCA PRCA PR & COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL CHAIR MANAGING DIRECTOR AT FIVE IN A BOAT LTD

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TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

An issue which rears its ugly head time and time again for communications professionals is the idea of complete transparency versus selective truth-telling. After all, we are hired to protect the reputation of businesses but equally those businesses have a duty-of-care to their customers and employees. So how do you strike the right balance? How do you make sure that a company is being honest but in a way that does not negatively impact the business? There are various ways of addressing potential ethical dilemmas.

Firstly, you need to look at your own values and whether you share the same values as the company. If you do share the same values but a business is behaving unethically, you need to be courageous in challenging leaders and in not acquiescing if you believe that further reputational damage will occur if the right measures are not put in place. If you don't share the same values, you should walk away.

Secondly it is important to get organisations to understand the importance of ethics –it needs to be made clear that ongoing training needs to happen so that everyone within the organisation can be prepared when a challenging situation arises.

Thirdly, there needs to be clear consequences for unethical behaviour -put simply, people and companies need to be held accountable.

SABINE HÜCKMANN **CEO OF KETCHUM GERMANY**

Sabine on Twitter

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TAKING A STANCE

Enterprises and brands have formulated a stance on many macro-societal megatopics, and they act and communicate accordingly. Now, however, there is a growing focus on another issue, one that is anything but new. Many firms are still finding it hard to handle because it is highly controversial and highly complex, doesn't stop at the factory gates, and can become a really divisive issue in the workforce: protection of fundamental democratic values. It is not a voluntary exercise in attitudinal gymnastics in which one can take part from time to time either as an individual or as a corporation. The very latest experience gained in connection with combating the COVID-19 pandemic has made that clear to every logical thinking person. Or take the recent unrest in the U.S. in connection with the election results in one of the world's oldest democracies

A stance does not function retrospectively. Developing one when you happen to need one or even playing the turncoat does not fit the bill. If, in the context of so-called alternative facts, the "truth" must be renegotiated on a daily basis, I must at least know where I stand. If, however, I first have to formulate and coordinate my stance before I can state it, it is then mostly too late. We all know how time-consuming reaching an agreement in the C-suite can be. Define now, and now at the latest, on which issues you must -and on which you want to- take a stand. And then go into scenario planning as in any good crisis preparation. What is likely to happen if I adopt this attitude, actively or reactively? Can we stand the heat? Can we maintain public advocacy of our position? How do I handle which reactions and through which channels? To advocate your position you need resources. And a stance is a long-term position. Even if the stock market, customers, and other stakeholders punish you temporarily, taking a stance pays dividends.

GILLY LOCK CMPRCA PRCA INVESTMENT SECTOR GROUP CHAIR DIRECTOR AT POWERSCOURT

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PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH

Asset managers have been a huge force for good on improving the ESG credentials of companies around the world. Using their influence as investors, they hold companies to account through active engagement with management teams and shareholder voting.

In recent years, as responsible investing has become more mainstream (and marketable), concerns over greenwashing within asset managers themselves, rather than just the companies they invest in, have risen to the fore. As investor money continues to flow into ESG, sustainable, and "impact" funds, asset managers have been keen to showcase their green credentials.

Fund managers would do well to remember that ESG is now a hygiene factor at the very least. In Europe, regulations are coming into place this year whereby asset managers need to disclose ESG considerations within funds to investors. Those offering responsible funds will need to continually prove that they are hitting the mark.

Asset managers need to look inwards. While much focus will remain on their portfolio investments, the spotlight has also turned onto the fund managers as corporate entities. Are asset management companies practicing what they preach?

Transparent and honest communications on ESG considerations, both within funds themselves, and at a corporate level, is now imperative for asset managers.

NITIN MANTRI PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER ICCO PRESIDENT GROUP CEO AT AVIAN WE



in Nitin on LinkedIn

DEFENDING THE TRUTH



While the internet has advanced the world in many ways, it has also brought an onslaught of misinformation and fake news. The problem has been compounded by the COVID-19 outbreak. The most salient example of this is the spread of vaccine misinformation, a phenomenon that undermines public health efforts and hinders global vaccination progress and our exit from the pandemic. Thankfully, healthcare firms and governments worldwide are doing their part to debunk fake news and defend the truth.

Similarly, the communications industry needs to be alert and adopt ways to identify and check the dissemination of false narratives by making fact-checks an indispensable part of its work. Our role must also extend to holding ourselves and our clients to high standards of authenticity.

Apart from this, it is our duty to identify, support, and collaborate with trusted information repositories such as recognised and reliable global and local media sources. Most communication firms have been collating information about the crisis from authentic media and health agencies to keep their clients updated. We must follow this practice even after the crisis is over. We must keep defending the truth and the people who tell it.

FRANK MARR CMPRCA PRCA TRAVEL & TOURISM GROUP CHAIR MANAGING DIRECTOR & CO-FOUNDER OF AM+A MARKETING & MEDIA RELATIONS

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- (©) Frank on Instagram



ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN THE TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT PR SECTOR

There are plenty of ethical challenges to be considered within a sector that plays a global role in bringing the world together, connecting cultures, and giving people beautiful life experiences.

Environmental responsibility — Travel PR is often about encouraging people to fly and take long journeys. We've worked hard to collaborate more with train and e-car rental companies, so that media experiences and online communications focus on greener forms of transport. We're also encouraging our clients to communicate new 'longer stay holiday packages', with the aim of reducing frequent flying and keeping people in places longer. This will also help further support local economies.

Tackling issues such as 'over-tourism' — Attempting to manage issues such as 'over-tourism' in locations that are tourism-dependent has always been a challenge. PR agencies are often expected to follow a specific brief to promote 'flagship locations'. However, the travel PR's role in 'tourism thought leadership', encouragement of organisational change, and reporting global behavioural shifts has increased.

Pushing for local supply chains — Destination and tourism PRs are sometimes expected to work with resorts and destinations that don't consider utilising local supply chains, often due to corporation supply network policies. PRs need to always consider the individual elements that make up the narrative they're promoting.

MASSIMO MORICONI PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER **GENERAL MANAGER & AMMINISTRATORE DELEGATO** AT OMNICOM PR GROUP ITALY



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SHAPING THE CONVERSATION

COVID-19 gave us time to re-think our lives, our priorities and how we treat our planet. Communications around climate change and circular economy will be significantly under pressure when pandemic has gone. We'll have a battle between "no matter what" economic recovery and the opportunity to leave future generations a place where they can live and prosper. In this context, ethics should guide decisions around which clients agencies should work for, PR holding companies, trade associations, and employees will need ethics more than ever to shape conversations about post-pandemic business choices.

What's the social role of PR in the post-pandemic? Which criteria will we use to select our clients? Do we need updated certifications/ethics code for our industry? Did this company accomplish what was promised? Is this company doing green/ purpose washing only? How do we know it? These are few of the questions we will find in our conversations...if we want to.

LEE NUGENT CMPRCA PRCA ETHICS COUNCIL MEMBER REGIONAL DIRECTOR APAC AT ARCHETYPE

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UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT MARKETS

The continuing rise of Asia as the world's powerhouse for growth poses an increasing challenge for global businesses headquartered in the West. Business (and communications) ethics are often seen through a Western black and white paradigm of what is right and what is wrong. Yet, in many parts of Asia, those lines are drawn in different places. National values and established cultures play a large part in understanding what is, and isn't, acceptable. For example, while all good practitioners would agree that Fake News is bad, in some countries it would be normal for a writer to practise self-censorship over truth-telling if they felt—in their opinion—they'd do less public harm and/or support an established government position that aids nation building. And attitudes to what is a conflict of interest (or not) can vary wildly.

When does a journalist freebie become a 'bribe', especially in a country where the culture of gift-giving is widespread? It's important for Western businesses and comms pros to understand such differences, many of which are borne out of a more secular Buddhist perspective than a Christian view on how society and individuals should behave.

Of course, there are real, significant ethical challenges too —those we'd associate with authoritarian governance, lack of corporate regulation, and emerging marketplaces. It's crucial that the current and next generation of comms pros are given the tools to help them navigate these challenges with care and respect. We all need to ensure we're training our people —yes—with regard to professional integrity, the need for disclosure, transparency, and openness, but also how to traverse the challenges of operating in different, highly exciting, often surprising markets right around the world.

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I am as much a Cultural Anthropologist and Behavioural Scientist just as I am a Public Relations Consultant. Culture is powerful and plays a significant role in shaping PR practice. Gifts are powerful components of the culture of Africa and indeed Nigeria. The line between what we call payments and gifts sometime dissolves in Africa, especially in Nigeria, where gifts are given in cash. To a Nigerian, this is culture. To a foreign practitioner, this is an anathema. While some of them understand the cultural dynamics in Africa and Nigeria, unfortunately many of them are legally constrained to embrace it. For example, the UK Bribery Act (2010) has extraterritorial reach. A global agency that has operations in the UK can be prosecuted under the ACT, regardless of the fact that the gift classified as a bribe was collected somewhere in Nigeria where such is ethically and perhaps legally permissible.

Shall we just set a threshold? This too is problematic. The complexity of foreign currency exchange rate is where the trap lies. A hundred pounds gift to a Journalist may exceed acceptable gift threshold when converted into naira in Nigeria.

The Principle of Proportionality under the ACT is fluid. It says gifts and hospitality gestures are not likely to be classified as a bribe where they are "proportionate to the nature, scale, and complexity of an organisation's business activities." Again, this is a slippery ground!



KAREN OVSEYEVITZ MPRCA PRESIDENT LATIN AMERICA AT PORTER NOVELLI

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MISINFORMATION: ONE OF THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES FACING COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORS IN LATIN AMERICA

Misinformation is one of the most pressing challenges for communicators in Latin America. The COVID-19 pandemic drove a surge in news consumption and use of social media to search for information. Social media became a very popular channel to get news and fake news. The misinformation phenomenon is now widely spread in the region, which increases the risk of people exposed to false information. Misinformation becomes more dangerous when considering the existing low trust in institutions.

The threat of misinformation is becoming a serious challenge and its power is extending very fast touching our lives in many different ways, affecting our health decisions, our shopping habits, our vote, and our perception on issues like justice and racial inequality.

Companies are taking action against disinformation and to manage rumours and false data about their brands. But besides working against fake stories that affect their image and reputation, they are not working towards actively restoring the trust in information.

As communication advisors we need to develop campaigns that educate and inform the public, not only sell products. We need to rely on experts and third parties that validate the information and provide credibility to our message. And we need to drive companies, government, media, and regulators to work together to combat this threat.

BARBARA PHILLIPS MPRCA PRCA RACE & ETHNICITY EQUITY BOARD (REEB) CHAIR. FOUNDER OF BROWNSTONE COMMUNICATIONS

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RECLAIMING LOST HUMANITY

The global pandemic saw the outpouring of feelings around race, mental wellbeing, ways of working, and socio-economic hardships that shone a light on the cultures that define the PR and comms industry. Redefining culture is the number one ethical challenge for comms advisors because now we can't unsee all of the suffering and isolation endured by colleagues, clients being close to collapse, and the realisation that perhaps our industry wasn't (for some) such a great place to work after all.

It becomes an ethical dilemma because do we:

- 1. Advise our leaders and clients to return to the winning formula. fully cognisant of the psychological cost to colleagues and customers -but with one eve on a 100% salary or elusive bonuses and profits -because we need the money, right?
- 2. Advise our clients to make changes that demonstrate they have seen and heard the impact of global events both financially and morally. Should clients shout about their profits from 2020? Or keep quiet?

We are still defining what is ethical in PR and comms, but I think it's clear that ignoring the opportunity to reclaim some of our industry's lost humanity, while knowing what we all know -is clearly unethical.

NICKY REGAZZONI FPRCA PRCA VIRTUAL PR AGENCY GROUP CHAIR CO-FOUNDER & CO-CEO AT PR NETWORK

Nicky on Twitter

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MENTAL HEALTH AND COMPANY CULTURE

I listened to a great Clubhouse discussion on mental health moderated by Arun Sudhaman and Maja Pawinska Sims of PRovoke, with guests Barbara Phillips, Koray Camgöz, and Matt Cartmell.

Improving mental health in the PR industry, which was experiencing mass burnout even before COVID-19, is a key ethical consideration for employers as they build back their company culture.

It's been a year since we started living in a brave new world that accelerated the pace of work when we needed it to decelerate. One industry leader called for a return to 'slow PR' –a halcyon time when achieving one story a day sold to one paper would be considered a job well done.

As agency leaders, we have a responsibility to address the creeping mental health issue that was burdening our industry long before COVID-19. That responsibility extends to acknowledging the role employers play in peoples' mental health equilibrium.

This doesn't just mean setting up a helpline or signing a charter. It is about prevention —as well as cure. It's about firing a client bully (we did this in 2020) despite the dent in your bottom line. It's about recognising that a 9–5 working hours contract does not work for a UK account manager working on US or APAC accounts. As Barbara explained, people from minority backgrounds can experience a myriad of other issues which white people don't deal with and may not consider. Spot pain points early and address them so that any existing mental health conditions aren't exacerbated by unnecessary stress or pressures.

There are a few great practical initiatives happening above and beyond the ones we tend to hear about. I was lucky to be on a panel organised by Jane Fordham about mental health in the workplace with Rob Stephenson, the founder of the InsideOut leaderboard: high profile leaders sharing publicly their personal mental health challenges, destignatising the issue for big business.

With <u>28% of PR leaders</u> citing staff mental health and motivation as their main concern post-Covid, this seems a perfect moment in time for a total reset of our working culture.

JOLEENA SEAH MPRCA DIRECTOR SOUTHEAST ASIA AT GHC ASIA

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(f) Joleena on Facebook

GIFTS AND BRIBERY



In the spirit of product trials and user tests, common tactics involve lavish gourmet indulgence or complimentary guest experiences at coveted luxury resorts that most people can only dream about. It is expected that business class air tickets, chauffeured limousine transfers, suite stays, and unlimited spa treatments are included in the experience. To sustain media conversations, exquisite gifts and extravagant festive hampers are constantly delivered to the media's home.

It's a tried and tested formula that works. Nobody frowns upon such actions because they result in beautiful spreads in glossy magazines and the most influential luxury platforms. We justify our generous gift giving and ostentatious media trips because the impressive Share of Voice analysis validates our actions.

When the media and top social influencers abuse their power by requesting for personal favours with veiled threats of a negative report if we do not accede to their unreasonable demands, our industry accepts this abuse for fear of upsetting them. Instead of calling them out for unethical behaviour, we bend back double to appease this precious circle of influential media contacts.

While gifting and bribery are integral to the business culture in Asia, there is a need to provide safety nets for whistle blowers to expose these black sheep when they breach the boundary. Unfortunately, there is no central body to govern media ethics and behaviour, especially for social influencers. Until such a platform is established to sound the alarm, we will continue to roll our eyes in silence.



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GDPR'S FAILURE ON FACEBOOK

We're approaching three years since GDPR was enacted. Its goal was to help us take control of our data, to hold companies to account, and to (famously) give us the right to be forgotten. It had huge ramifications in our industry around the use and protection of data –yet the legislation didn't touch the biggest sellers of private data. How did the social media giants escape?

The problem is that GDPR mainly targets the resellers of private data (so-called third-party data). Companies now can't harvest data from multiple sources and use it against you, but if one company happens to know everything about you then that is fine –in fact if anything, GDPR has made these companies more valuable. And so, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter have all benefited from GDPR.

Not only this, the sophistication is next level now. All is being used to make better decisions based on everything that companies know about us. The problem is that GDPR is watered down when it comes to Al-based decisions. There's such a high threshold in the legislation around the requirement for disclosing automated decision-making that it means GDPR's "right to explanation" is almost entirely ignored. Facebook's "why am I seeing this ad" explanation is cursory at best.

The status quo of questionable ethical use of our data by social media giants is unlikely to remain. We already saw a backlash against Facebook over WhatsApp user data recently. Consumers are getting wise to social media data policies, and regulators are already taking a keen interest. Change is coming. PR should be the guardians of ethical policies. It is down to us to guide brands we represent to do the right thing.





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