

## **GIO Podcast Series: An Innovation Conversation with WPP**

**Transcript Title:** Becoming Upwardly Mobile: Discussing The Potential Of A Universal Platform

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**Podcast Length:** 10:50

**Summary:** Ranjan Kapur, Country Manager for India for WPP, one of the world's largest communications services groups made up of leading companies in advertising, media investment management, public relations and public affairs, and branding and identity discusses changing paradigms in media and content, including the creation of a universal visual language to help combat a high rate of illiteracy in rural areas.

**Host:** Amy Hermes, Global Innovation Outlook, IBM

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HERMES: Hello, and welcome to the Global Innovation Outlook Podcast Series where IBM demonstrates the innovative value of collaboration.

My name is Amy Hermes, and today I'll be speaking with Ranjan Kapur, who is the country manager for India for WPP, one of the world's largest communication services groups made up of leading companies in advertising, media investment management, public relations and public affairs and branding and identity just to name a few. Thanks Ranjan, for joining me today.

KAPUR: Thank you for having me.

HERMES: So let me jump right in and ask you a little bit about one of the points you made in the Deep Dive in Mumbai. How are changing paradigms in media and content affecting the way that consumers are interacting with brands and the organizations that they purchase from?

KAPUR: There's a lot happening in this entire space right now. First of all, when the economy started opening up about 12 years ago, things started changing.

We went from a seller's economy to a buyer's economy. Consumers at last had a choice. They earlier didn't have a choice. Quality consciousness arose substantially over the last 10 or 12 years.

Marketers are having to now review their entire approach to branding, because my belief is that the brands of the previous century will not exist in this century. New brands are coming up because I believe the brands that have been created in an era of shortages are not brands.

They are truly created in eras of plenty when consumers have a choice and brands have to create a differentiator between themselves and their competitors.

And that's really happening now. And that choice is making a significant difference in the way consumers now interact with brands because they're far more skeptical of brand communication.

They want to be far more interactive with brands. Communication which is traditional like television and newspapers, et cetera, is like a monologue because it is a one-way communication.

Consumers are beginning to look for dialogue between them (and brands). They're looking for experiences with brands. So brand loyalty's gone for a bit of a toss. New brands are

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emerging. New brands are dethroning the old brands -- I've seen this transformation take place in the last 10 or 12 years. And it's absolutely fascinating, Amy.

HERMES: This is actually the perfect segue into my next question. In today's ever-changing environment, who controls the brand? And does this control over brands matter to the associated organization or individuals or both?

KAPUR: We are going through a period of transition. I think co-creation, (which is really what it's about), and it was as a result of the Internet, as a result of brands just not being products anymore but services. (This) means that the brand is now trying to create an experience for the consumer whether it's through the Internet, whether it's YouTube, Google. Even in India, for example, co-creation is becoming the order of the day.

And I think that that's going to accelerate into the future. India is the perfect example of leapfrog technologies. We still have cows on the streets on one end and super jets at the other. I think we live with these differences rather nicely.

But that's what's happening. Consumers are now beginning to co-create. So ownership of the brand is moving slowly but surely from the brand owner to the customer or the consumer.

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HERMES: So let me switch gears just a little bit. What are the potential ways that disconnected communities such as rural areas can be transformed through commoditized mobile devices with Internet access?

KAPUR: That's my favorite subject, Amy. If you look at what's happening in India, we have, at a rough guess about 625,000 villages. We have 700 million people living in rural India today out of the total of 1.1 billion people.

Almost 67 percent of our population lives in rural areas and distances are vast in this country. There are pockets of civilizations, and there could be several miles distancing one village gathering from another village gathering (kids have to) walk five kilometers to get to a school so that they can get some education.

There are villages that have no water. The villagers have to walk two to three kilometers to a nearby river. So India is living in a space where we have these 625,000 villages accommodating 700 million people, areas that are disconnected from each other. We have dialects which are in excess of 800/850 known dialects. And a dialect changes every 10 kilometers. Now, you can imagine what it does for communication, for example.

Our agency ran the Ogilvy outreach program where we were trying to reach the rural masses. We covered in one year 85,000 villages. We needed 15,000 people (to accomplish

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this). They used to walk to these villages because there was no transportation, there was no telecommunication.

Over 200 million people in India live in what I call media dark areas. They have no media available to them. No TV. No print. No radio.

HERMES:       What do you think is the potential for iconic devices to transform communities that have traditionally suffered economically from a high rate of illiteracy?

KAPUR:        One thing is very clear that as we define literacy today, it's an individual's ability to read and write language script, for example.

But literacy cannot and will never be a measure of intelligence. And neither is literacy a measure of an individual's capability to communicate and/or conduct business, if you think about it.

Just this morning, Amy, I was reading an article by a social linguist called Peggy Mohan and she argues in her paper titled "Is English the Language of the Future." She says that the control of the discourse of science and technology is what will give a language a hold of the future, not literature and poetry.

My point is that English itself is a very complicated language. It's a phonetic language. It has its own rules

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of engagement. Words are not spelled as they're pronounced. So it's a very difficult language for an illiterate to learn. That's where this whole issue of visual icons comes in.

And that's based on the belief that children today, young kids, three years old, two years old, who have not yet reached the level at which they can be called literate, are interacting with technology.

They're playing video games. What is their medium of interaction? It's all visual. If you think about it, language, the written word, emerged seven or 800 years ago, 900 years ago. Amy, at the time when the spoken word could only be captured in writing. I wonder what would have happened to society if we had a recording device before we had a writing device.

HERMES: With the emergence of this, would you say that we're seeing the end of traditional word-based literacy as a socioeconomic barrier? What are the ramifications of all this to local and global growth?

KAPUR: Let's call the written language a communication code. It could be language that replicates a phonetic language, or a language that's a pictogram like the Chinese or Japanese language. Each of them have their own rules of engagement. Each of them have their own complicated ways, and each of these languages have evolved as society has

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evolved. And the language has matured as more requirements have come up.

I'm not for a moment denying that a written language will still be needed in the future. What I'm saying is that we have to overcome this problem of educating the masses... to be able to get the real benefits of technology, and that's really what we're talking about. Today the real benefits of technology are not available to illiterates. And I'm saying that visual icons can probably overcome this issue. What we need is a universal language; a communication code which I suspect is going to be based on some visual icons, because that seems the easiest, and most universally recognizable way of being able to communicate with each other.

I suspect that visual icons will become the language of technology. They may not become the language of poetry and literature, that may still remain the written word. But going into the future, the language that helps you control science and technology is the language that's going to be king. And that need not be English or Hindi or Chinese or Japanese.

Let me give you an example, Amy. I'm just taking India (as an example) because I'm sitting here right now. Take mobile telephony. Mobile telephony is growing at the rate somewhere between six and seven million new phones per month, which means that we have somewhere between 75 and 90 million phones coming into the market every year.

Can you imagine what's going to happen in five years' time? There will be 350 to 400 million phones added to the 175 million today. So that makes it a total of some 575 million phones. Half of them will be in the hands of a rural community that is considered illiterate.

Literacy is not going to grow at the same pace as mobile telephony is. Now, therefore, voice will be available to our rural illiterates. But, can we develop a visual icon language that allows the rural community to actually interact through those visual icons to conduct commerce, to conduct business, to find enterprise solutions, to communicate with other people?

I think some worldwide research is required, to find universal icons. To develop visual icons that can help them (users) interact with technology, I believe mobile telephony is really going to help us take this thing forward, because the Internet connections aren't growing as fast.

But I think there is a possibility that we can actually leap frog into a state where we will redefine literacy so that the guy can at least conduct business, communicate with people, even talk to people who speak a different language or a different dialect.

There are other languages that have recently emerged. And when I say recently, I would say in the last couple of

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hundred years. Braille for the visually impaired. Sign language for the hearing impaired. So there is hope, and because there is scope to start with, I think technology is now taking us into the darkest areas of the world.

We've got to find a language that's readily available that allows instant and universal acceptance. And I think the time has come to get together to develop that language.

This is a subject I am so passionate about.

HERMES: I was going to say and it comes through and it's great. Ranjan thank you so much for joining me today

KAPUR: Thank you so much.

HERMES: For more information about the Global Innovation Outlook please visit [www.ibm.com/gio](http://www.ibm.com/gio).

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