

Intro: Hello, and welcome to a special episode of Engage, a podcast from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations that was recorded live at its annual conference Influencing the Future. This episode is hosted by members of the podcast editorial board, Debbie West and Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell. In it, they ask each of the contributors to summarise their key takeaways from the event and for their thoughts on the future of our professions across ESG, public affairs and deep fakes.

Debbie West: Hello. Hi, Soli. Your talk was fantastic. So what key takeaways were you hoping, as professionals, we would carry into our workplaces from your talk?

Soli Townsend: So, I have absolute faith that the PR industry can become a huge part of the solution, not part of the problem. At the moment, kind of, bets are off which way we're going to go. We actually are often contributing to the problem, we're often supporting 'business as usual' and sometimes, historically, there's been bad practice around disinformation on climate change.

In the future, what we've got to do is we've got to PR the solutions. And what I really want people to come away from this conference with is a sense of their own power, their ability, the fact that they can generate change, because, historically, good PR has been missing from climate action.

Debbie West: Yeah, that's a brilliant point. I really liked the slide you shared with the solutions on it. So how can we highlight those solutions?

Soli Townsend: So, we have the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, who just this year essentially gave us the roadmap of how we solve climate change. Thank you, IPCC. And in there, there's 61 behavioural well, behavioural outcomes, that if we can help people do them, it's going to save 5% of global demand-side carbon.

On Futerra's website, you can download a synthesis of that report called 'People Power and the IPCC'. Unless you've got a long, boring evening, you might not want to read the IPCC report itself! Read our synthesis of it! And that is absolutely how we can contribute. We've got skills of behaviour change, we can simplify, we can help educate, we can get eyeballs and attention on things. The solutions to climate change really need that.

We don't have to communicate the problem. Climate change is now communicating itself in horrible, devastating, publicly visible ways, from floods to forest fires. It's the solutions that need our help.

Soli Townsend: Every PR person is needed. Take a couple of minutes today to write down how you are going to contribute to solving this giant crisis of our time.

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: So, Nina, you just delivered a slightly different session to our audience about generative AI, which both amazed and terrified me. Would you mind

just introducing yourself and briefly defining what generative AI is and what you were hoping that audience would take away from your talk?

Nina Schick: Absolutely. My name is Nina Schick. I am an author, advisor and keynote speaker. My background is in geopolitics. I used to work with global leaders advising on information warfare and election integrity, things like that. But over the course of my career, I really realised the big story of our lifetime – one that's going to affect every single person alive – is the exponential change led by artificial intelligence and technology.

So, I've recently, for the past five, six years since my first book came out, Deepfakes, I've been really delving into this area of now what has recently been coined generative AI. And I call this new, I think, era that we're entering into the age of generative AI. And what I think this is, is a new age in which artificial intelligence will be able to autonomously create almost anything that we formerly attributed as being unique to human intelligence or human creativity. And that includes all digital content.

And the reason why I'm so passionate about speaking about this and why I delivered the speech today was because this is universal. There is no person, no company, no country that isn't affected by how generative AI is going to change society, how it's going to change our perception of the world.

And this isn't something that's happening far off in the future. It's happening now. For decades, we've, kind of, hypothesised about how AI might change the world, and of course, there already is a lot of kind of applied AI. But the recent advances in generative AI is really taking it to the next level. And we're going to start to see the differences that generative AI is going to make in the next six to twelve months.

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: So, in relation to generative AI, you mentioned that there's going to be a greater need for demonstrating authenticity and provenance of any content that people share. Can you just give us your thoughts in terms of what you think synthetic content means for trusted media?

Nina Schick: So basically, one of the manifestations of the era of generative AI is that, increasingly, all digital content that billions of us interact with every single day, whether it's video, audio, images, copy, is going to actually be created by AI. You've already seen the advent of AI models that can autonomously generate audio, images, video, copy, just from mere textual prompts. You basically tell an AI what to create, you type it in, and then it does it for you.

This means that all digital content, because of the kind of ease by which you can do it, because of the scalability, because of the accessibility now to billions of people to create sophisticated digital content with the help of AI-powered tools, all content that we interact with in the information ecosystem or online digital ecosystem is increasingly going to be made by AI.

That means it is not authentic in the sense that it is not made by a camera, it is not made by a human; it is synthetic in nature – i.e., fake or created by AI. So we absolutely, going forward, need to figure out a way where we can distinguish what's authentic and what's synthetic.

Because if we don't, there's a phenomenon known as the 'liars dividend' where people understand that anything you interact with, anything you read, anything you engage with, including video, which has thus far tended to function as an extension of our own perception, which is why video evidence is so compelling in a court of law – you know, 'I saw it, I heard it, therefore it must be true'. But once people start to understand that that is no longer true because AI can fake anything, including video, then you start tipping into cynicism.

And that means that you lose trust in the medium of all digital content. Nothing is trustworthy anymore. And you absolutely cannot have a functioning society if people no longer trust the medium of any digital content, right? Whether it's an email from your bank, a photograph that your mother sent you, whether it's a phone call from your child – if you know that the medium can be corrupted and there's no way to prove that it's authentic, then you're looking really into the abyss.

So we want to be able to seize the creative potential of generative AI because it's going to allow billions of people to create really sophisticated, compelling content. But we need to be able to do so in full transparency. And this is where the idea of media authenticity and provenance comes in.

So this can broadly be broken down into three strands. The first is the idea of secure capture. So if you are creating authentic media, like a photograph or a video, for instance. Let's say you're a journalist and you want to report on a warzone, you can do so now with secure capture, so that the moment that media is captured, the fact that it's authentic, is recorded and sealed, cryptographically sealed into the metadata of that media file; so it can never be dismissed as something that's synthetic or made by AI. You know, from the blueprint, the DNA of that piece of content, it's authentic.

The second thing is the idea of a chain of provenance, and this is true for all AI-created content or all synthetic content. This is the idea that any media now needs to come with context, a chain of provenance showing: Is it synthetic? Is it authentic? How's it been edited? Who does this belong to? How is this piece of content evolved over its lifetime? Because only with full transparency and context, because we're not in the business of telling people 'this is true' or 'this is not' – nobody wants to be the arbiter of truth – but what you can do is give people additional context so they can make the right trust decisions based on that context.

And the final idea, again, going back to authentication, I talked about secure capture for authentic media, but you also want to be able to authenticate all digital content, whether it's authentic or made by AI. And that is because you want to be able to trace where it came from and who created it, who it owns too. Because as generative AI implodes in

the digital ecosystem, people who create content with AI are going to want to be able to show, 'this belongs to me'. This isn't something that's, you know...'this is the authentic version of an AI-augmented video made by Nina Schick, and not something that somebody else made where they're claiming to be Nina Schick.

So, it's an entirely new concept which hasn't been necessary before, but it absolutely will be necessary moving forward to be able to show: is this the authentic version of your content, whether it's generated with AI or whether it's created without the help of AI?

Debbie West: We've just come out of two back-to-back sessions that were really about high tech, so social media use and adoption of TikTok in particular, and then the rise of AI and, you know, AI-generated content that's going to pervade digital channels in the future. Do you see a lot of use of those sorts of social media channels in the type of work that you do? And can you see a role for that in the future?

Ben Cohen: We look very enviously at the really hip and happening charities, probably in London – we're based in Oxfordshire – and go 'we're not ready, we're not ready', but we're going to have to be ready.

The thing with TikTok and Snapchat, it's something I'm constantly forcing people to face, and that is we are wired for story, we're not wired for facts and figures. And all the time I'm dealing with people saying, 'look, we've got this new report out, we've got this new information out, the world must be interested'. And of course the world aren't interested.

And, yes, there's still a place for words, but, you know, we're all going to have to be storytellers and we're going to have to be multiplatform storytellers, you know, doing one thing in landscape and one thing in portrait and goodness knows what else.

So, yeah, it's upping the game of telling the story of people's lives and in our case, sufferings and, yeah, putting it on steroids, really. I think the thing, and of course you know it already, is people are being bombarded by press releases and photos and it's just exponential. And I thought the best piece of advice was actually the SPAD' – Peter the SPAD – whose book sounds like a lot of fun, is: just know exactly what you want to say, why it would be useful for the person you want to say it to, and how are you going to say it in 45 seconds?

And that's, yes, get your act together, know exactly what your messaging is to within an inch of its life. And, yes, it's a learning for me and for everyone.

Sara-Anne Mills Bricknell: So, you talked about innovating for the future, but there's a lot of common mistakes that people are making at the moment. You talked through quite a few. Can you just give us a couple for our listeners?

Peter Cardwell: Well, I suppose it's about talking to the right person. It's about: make sure you know what your ask is and what your top ask is, how much it's actually going to cost? And when you actually get that conversation, can you convince someone very, very quickly? Because the commodity that most government ministers, special advisors, senior civil servants have least of is time.

So it's really important to refine your pitch, to know exactly what it is and also how it fits in politically, not to the manifesto, to the next election and so on. Sort of sell it on that basis, because all politicians are looking in a short-term way. If you talk about something ten years in the future, they're just not going to be interested because they're just not going to be in the same job.

Sara-Anne Mills Bricknell: And you made a really interesting point at the end of your session around communications and connecting and the importance of that. Can you just talk a little bit about that?

Peter Cardwell: Yeah. In terms of the thing I mentioned at the end of speech, I suppose it's just really important to talk about and to ensure that you know anything that they're likely to ask, anything that you are... you can bring into the meeting, you can bring people into the meeting, but if they're not going to speak, there's no point introducing them necessarily, but using the time effectively and also engaging with the kind of discussions that people are going to have at the moment in terms of manifesto, whether it's a Conservative or Labour manifesto, they're thinking about that at the moment. The election may be less than two years away.

Sara-Anne Mills Bricknell: And then there was a really great question at the end, which has caused a lot of debate on Twitter and a lot of news pieces at the moment around the appointment of journalists in strategic comms roles. Can you just summarise your response to that?

Sure. I know Amber de Botton, I worked with her at Sky News, and I think she is a very capable, professional person who inspires a lot of respect in the people that she works with. I think it can be difficult for anybody, no matter how qualified, to go directly from journalism into comms. It doesn't always work, but I think it will with Amber, because she is a very... she'll listen to advice and she'll know what she doesn't know, and I think that she has a bright future ahead. But it's a very tough one for anybody, but certainly she's the right choice.

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: So, hello, **Alicia**. Do you just want to share where you're joining us from today?

Alicia Zubeir: I'm calling in all the way from Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: Ooh exciting. And what do you do? What's your role?

Alicia Zubeir: I'm actually in corporate communications. I...My position: I'm considered a writer, business professional writer, so I do a lot of the company publications, reports and all that for the company I'm working with, yes.

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: Incredible. And obviously, the fact that the CIPR has organised this year's conference as a hybrid event has enabled you to join us today. What has the experience been like joining virtually?

Alicia Zubeir: Well, it's great because I actually get to join the whole conference all the way from Malaysia. Normally, you have to fly down there, so it's great that I can actually listen and it's wonderful because you get to hear a lot of different views and opinions. There's a lot of interesting stuff being discussed about and you talk about the future and I think, you know, in communications we're always looking at new ways of engaging our audiences and all that, so it's great to discuss that on topics like ESG. I was listening to a talk just now on the metaverse, so there's lots of ideas that's being shared and that's great.

Of course I also like the idea, I mean some of the sessions I would have loved to have joined – the breakout sessions – but I think that was not possible. But it's okay because we can actually listen to it so I'm not glued 100% with full time to my screen so I can actually still take time and still benefit even after this conference. So that's great

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: I agree **Soli's** talk this morning was incredible. Have there been any other takeaways that you've taken from the conference this morning?

Alicia Zubeir: I think here is... The one I still... I was very intrigued with the discussion around the sustainability and ESG and everything. I actually come from an oil and gas company so it's like how do we talk about that? How do you drive that positive change? I think it's about responsible public relations, and you know, how do you actually make, you know, it's actually a very complex topic on its own and it's a huge change. It's not just one company but it's actually the whole world that actually has to come together, and how do you actually play your part and actually create that positive even if you're from an industry that is considered as, you know, the evil of ESGs and all that, right?

Sara-Anne Mills-Bricknell: 100%.

Alicia Zubeir: Yes.

Debbie West: Well, congratulations on an excellent talk and a very popular talk. Kindly would you just introduce yourself, tell us who you are, what you do?

Dev Mistry: Yeah, I'm Dev Mistry, I am global internal comms manager at Dice.

Debbie West: Perfect, thank you. Thank you very much for championing internal communications today. I thought your talk was really interesting and I love the fact that you focused a lot on culture and the idea that you can't dictate to culture but you can

influence it. So I'm really interested in that. How is internal communicators... can we influence culture for the better, for the future?

Dev Mistry: Really important, really easy one: we can change the way we speak and we can change the nuances of how others speak as well, which is really important. Content, materials, anything that's visible to people. But I think the most important one for me is the consultancy of really having an ear to the ground and knowing what people are saying across the business. And when you're in those meetings where you do have some power and you do have a voice, speaking up and saying 'actually, this might not work because of X, X and X' or 'this might be a better solution', and really having that power to understand what's going to really work well for your business but also work well for comms.

Debbie West: Perfect. And you said right at the beginning that you felt like PR and comms have changed quite a lot in the, sort of, ten years or more since you graduated. Are those changes for the better? What do you see as the main changes in that time?

Dev Mistry: I definitely see them as something for the better because, actually, if things were still the same as they were in 2012, I don't think we'd be able to do our jobs, right? If you think about it, you could do a briefing to a thousand employees in what, 2012, and the likelihood of that getting leaked would be really low, right? It would take a little while. Whereas now, as soon as the words have left your mouth, you could probably find them on an internet platform or social media platform somewhere else, right? So you have to evolve to get with that.

And sometimes it's technology, right? But sometimes it's practices, like when you brief media, you're briefing your employees at the same time, right? They're both getting that information straight there and then, rather than trying to, kind of, elongate it out, where you create gaps in that process where things are going to slip through and then it creates more work, not just for comms people, but for businesses as well. So I think that's the main thing.

I think the other thing for me is comms in general having a seat at the table and having a voice. Whereas before they were seen as a support function, actually now they're more of an integrated function. I think more people and more businesses put emphasis on trust in comms than they probably would have done in 2012. If you've got anything to do with people or culture or nuance, get a comms person in the room, get them with your people person as well, or HR team, because, actually, between people and comms, you've got a really good understanding of how businesses work, but also how people feel and how people might feel in future.

And you've got the current situation but from comms' point of view you've also got the foresight as well. So it's really making sure that you're protected at all angles for the business.

I think comms, internal comms, has been stereotyped as a profession for a certain type of person, and actually it's not. And actually it needs new blood to come in and people to understand the importance comms has both internally and externally within the running of a business.

So I would love to see, in future, more young people exploring the different aspects of public relations and communications and really finding out what impact they can make not just on business, but then, in turn, society as well.

Rachel Roberts: I'm Rachel Roberts. I'm the president of the CIPR.

Debbie West: Brilliant, thank you. Tell us a little bit about how the day has been today.

Rachel Roberts: The day has been fantastic. Our focus is about inspiring the future and we've heard from amazing speakers across the landscape of PR, public affairs, consumer PR, digital. And what's been amazing is we know how to keep driving influence – that's what we've always done as an industry. But what's been really exciting is to recognise the achievements and the contribution-making right now.

So, we've just made recognition to two really important people who've contributed to our industry. Firstly, I've just awarded the Sir Stephen Tallents Medal to Avril Lee. She has been an amazing PR professional. She's achieved so much in her career professionally, particularly within healthcare communications. But, more importantly, she's made a massive contribution to driving the agenda around diversity and inclusion. She's championed the CIPR Diversity Inclusion Network and she's really inspired us all to think differently, so it's great to award her with the medal and give her that recognition.

Secondly, I presented the President's Medal to Richard Bagnall. Again, someone who's championed the industry for a number of years, particularly around the area of measurement and demonstrating the proof and the value of PR. And if we want to influence the future, we have to show how we influence the outcomes.

So, measurement and evaluation and impact is really pivotal to inspiring the future and influencing the future. So, collectively, if you look at everything we spoke about today, it's really packaged everything that's important. We've looked at how the media landscape is changing, the expectations of PR and the dynamics of what we do but, most importantly for me, the people and the talent within it.

The future of our industry is really pivotal to the people that come in and fuel the next generation of talent. So, I think inspiring thoughts today really make me spring out of bed and want to keep on practising this industry and bring a lot of people along with me. And that's what we need to do to keep driving the future and driving influence.

Outro: Thanks for listening to this special episode of Engage. We'll feature links to resources relating to the issues discussed in the podcast in the show notes. But

remember, as ever, don't let the conversation stop there. If you have any comments about the Episode, share them on Twitter using the hashtag Engage.