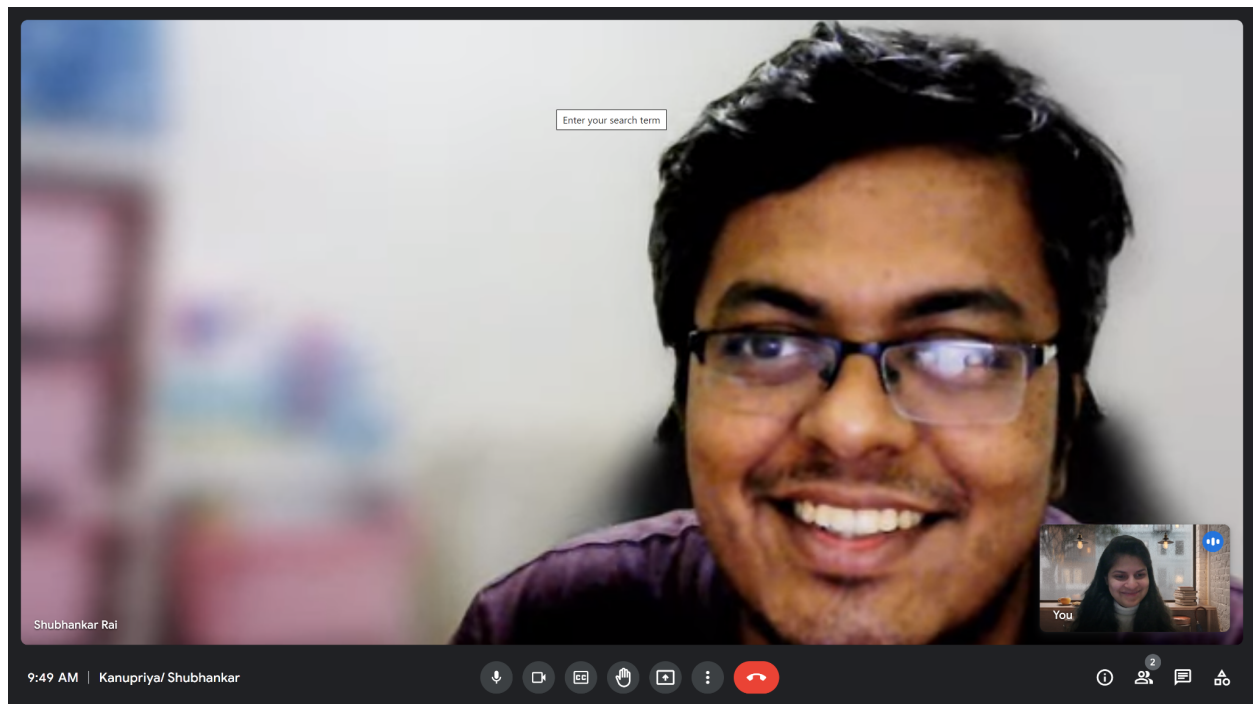


- **About my interviewee**

When I was asked to interview a thought leader in the digital media space, I decided to ask Shubhankar Rai who is my mentor and guide & I have had the opportunity to interact with him 6 years ago at a workshop conducted by Google. Post that, we had connected on LinkedIn and had a couple of other interactions to discuss digital marketing strategies and overall guidance for my career. Since then I have been appreciative of his analytical approach, skills in the domain and overall willingness to help.

Shubhankar Rai currently works at Google as the Go to market lead for their mobile apps advertising solutions in the Asia Pacific region. His current role is at the intersection of global product managers based in the US and the APAC business teams. He is responsible for identifying and evangelizing new customer centric product solutions for the Asia Pacific needs and examines the customer activities on usage. He has over a decade of professional experience across different verticals including information technology, manufacturing, classifieds, e-commerce, and internet.

I am really honored that I interviewed him for my assignment and got a chance to get so many insightful thoughts from such a proficient leader in the digital space.



- **Summary of our interaction**

About his upbringing: Shubhankar was always fascinated by advertising & fondly remembers a few radio jingles that he loved humming as a kid during his childhood days. He was very fond of numbers and won several international competitions. He described digital marketing as the confluence of these two things : being creative in how you showcase your brand & possessing good analytical skills to be able to interpret numbers or metrics like Cost Per Acquisition, Return on Ad Spend, Cost Per Click. He has worked on

digital marketing across several industries like classifieds, e-commerce & he has been with Google for the last 5 years.

Beyond work: Shubhankar enjoys spending his weekends with his 4 year old daughter to stay calm and relaxed. He also loves playing tennis and considers it a great hobby to pick up to socialize away from work and an excellent form of lifelong exercise. He recommends everyone to find a hobby as he believes in "With the new hybrid work, the lines between what is home and what is office have blurred so this becomes even more important."

Impact of COVID19 to digital media: The pandemic & its implications is very top of mind currently so we began our discussion on this subject. According to him, the shift to digital has accelerated by a decade post the pandemic. A classical example was the impact observed by offline retail stores like Walmart. Before the pandemic, these companies looked at their e-commerce business as a separate line of business and had a limited focus v/s their stores. With COVID19, they realized their e-commerce assets will have to start playing a bigger role to alleviate anxiety & panic amongst shoppers apart from adhering to social distancing norms. With features like curbside pickup, it was heartening to see these retail chains adapt their business model. According to him, the shopping behavior of first time e-commerce shoppers may have changed permanently.

Pros and Cons of Digital World: He has been particularly impressed by the progress made by companies on digital transformation. It helped users who had a wide range of brands/businesses available across all industries like retail, social media, entertainment etc. If you look at social media in particular, it has been dominated by platforms like Facebook, and Instagram who are now facing a big threat because of a relatively new entrant like Tiktok. In fact, Tiktok was the most downloaded app in the US last year. In the retail business Amazon was not the top shopping app in the US but it was a company called Shein which is a fast fashion e-commerce platform.

These relatively new entrants make the digital space more interesting but there are a lot of downsides as well. He emphasized that as more platforms emerge and more users start relying on the internet for day-to-day information, it is almost a moral responsibility for these platforms to ensure a high quality user experience and should have strong protocols to protect user trust, and fight abuse and misinformation. The world has seen the importance at various times. Recently during the Russia-Ukraine war when fake videos surfaced on the internet led to unnecessary panic among the local community. E-commerce companies will need to do more to ensure the right product quality and fight counterfeits so that they offer the right user experience.

Opinion on future of digital marketing: According to Shubhankar, there are a few trends that would define the future of digital media:

- A) Short Form Content: Long gone are the days when people would be interested in reading long newspaper articles. With user attention spans at an all-time low, short form video or byte sized content will rule. To provide accurate information quickly will become absolutely critical for brands.
- B) Artificial Intelligence Personalization: We have already seen success stories like AI taking away the more mundane tasks of digital marketing with the launch of Performance Max campaigns by Google last year which runs across several properties like Search, Youtube & Display network to optimize ROI for advertisers.

There have been much wider use cases of AI with social platforms leveraging it to identify hate speech content & misinformation. As digital platforms scale adoption, AI will help companies automate their day to day processes and offer mass personalization at scale.

- C) User Privacy: Privacy is a hot topic currently for digital marketers especially after the iOS14 ATT changes that took place last year. Both Google & Apple have offered more users more controls over the data that they share with advertising partners. Digital marketers will have to adapt their marketing strategy and approach in this privacy conscious world where detailed user data won't be available.

Inspiration from Facebook and Amazon:

- A) Amazon: One of the core values of Amazon is customer obsession which has helped them become one of the most trusted and loved brands across all markets they operate in. This customer centricity is something that all digital companies and budding professionals can learn from.
- B) Facebook: Their success in building solid social media platforms and innovating even during their time as a market leader is praiseworthy. Facebook products of today look considerably different from what it was years ago and this high focus on innovation is quite inspiring.

Advice to budding professionals: Before wrapping up the interview Shubhankar had two big tips to offer the students:

- A) **Never stop learning or stop the habit of reading:** Digital Marketing is a field that is fast evolving and ideas flow around the globe. Learning and being up to date with all the latest technologies is a must. He recommended subscribing to newsletters, strategery, emarketer, search engine land etc. He also suggested enrolling in video lectures and podcasts to help more in comprehending new concepts.
- B) **Be courageous, don't panic or be afraid if you fail or join the wrong job:** Most of us are at the start of our digital career so it's ok to take risks and enjoy things as they come. Be bold in career moves and this could mean that joining an early stage startup may or may not be the safest career option but the skills & knowledge that would usually build will be invaluable and incomparable to what one can build in a large corporation.

• Key Takeaways and Learnings:

People usually have a mindset that you shape up your career from the first job. Whereas Shubhankar's approach was completely different, it changed my perspective of seeing things. He elaborated his experience on how he completely switched his career from sales to digital marketing. The job was not working out for him so he changed his strategies and defined his career in the digital space. I have learnt that our career would span across multiple decades so be courageous and do not hesitate in taking bold moves and calculated risks.

I have also understood the importance of: reading case studies as they illustrate real life business situations and emphasizes putting yourself in the shoes of a leader and leverage data points to make good decisions; expanding professional network for the career growth as we need experts for priceless discussions, guidance, and mentorship instead of hanging between jobs; and keep on expanding horizons as the world is now changing faster than ever and being on top of latest technologies and trends help you not only grow exponentially but gives you confidence to never miss any opportunity.

Nowadays user privacy and data are being exploited by businesses to earn profit. As a digital marketer we should always keep our users first and build a user interface that is safe and secure for their experience. Gaining profits at the stake of user's privacy is not something to be proud of. Therefore, I would also stand up (just like Shubhankar's idea to work in the privacy and security domain) for the user's rights and privacy and definitely engage more to understand this functionality. I really like companies that are taking initiatives to protect user data and would like to devote my career to privacy safe measurements in the next 3-5 years.

I am very passionate about the digital marketing domain. My inclination for uncovering the mystery of user behavior is speeding 10X times. All these latest trends in disruptions such as blockchains, AI, machine learning, NFTs, Metaverse, etc. are the talk of the era and marketers are doing their level best to inculcate these trends in business for a better future. Hence, the more time I spend improving and building my digital skillset, the better it would be to stay relevant in the long run.