

# I prefer to keep the festival eco-friendly and cracker-free: Sudhanshu Pandey

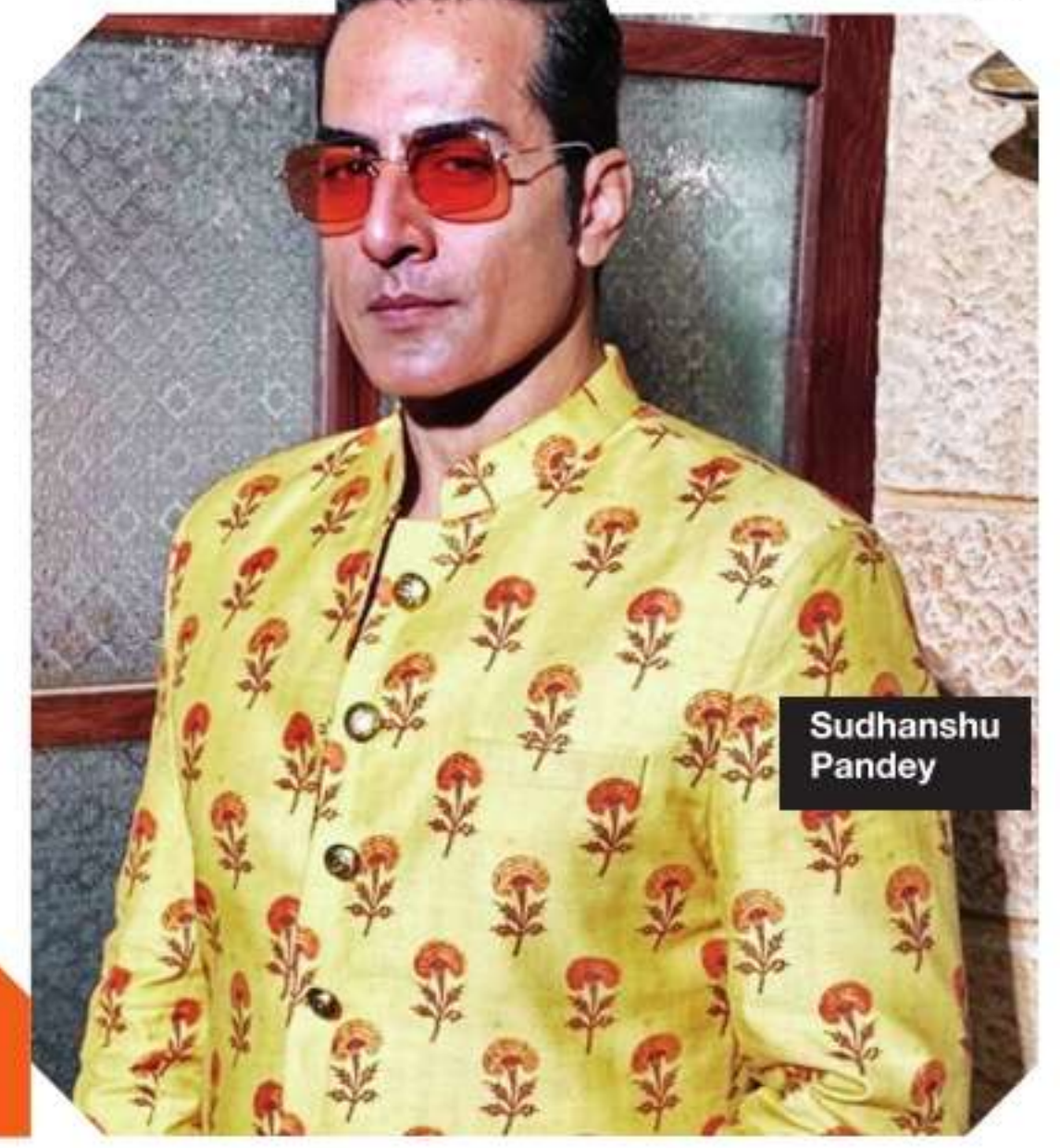
After two years of being homebound owing to the pandemic and celebrating festivals with just family, every auspicious occasion seems extra special this year. Everyone can go out, meet their loved ones and revel in festivities. However, pandemic or not, Sudhanshu Pandey believes that there is no better way to celebrate a festival than doing it with family. And the plan is no different for Diwali. Sudhanshu, who has become a household name as Vanraj Shah in *Anupamaa*, is looking forward to celebrating the festival of lights with his wife Mona and their two sons - Nirvaan and Vivaan.

now I do it. Diwali is an extremely auspicious occasion. I'm living a balanced life and pray that everyone gets the desired balance in their lives, too." Even if it is going to be a COVID-free Diwali, Sudhanshu doesn't believe in going over the top with any festival. He says, "Diwali should be peaceful and celebrated with lights, *diyas* and *rangoli*. I feel it is a beautiful festival for everyone and the beauty should be retained by keeping it eco-friendly and not bursting any crackers." The actor adds that all the diet restrictions will be tossed out of the window for a day or two. After all, what's Diwali without our favourite *mithai*? "I won't follow any diet restrictions and will eat all the *mithai* and delicacies. During Diwali, one should enjoy the festivities without any bounds (smiles)." — Neha Maheshwari

## 'BUDGETS HAVE BEEN REDUCED EVEN ON OTT PLATFORMS, NOT JUST ON TELEVISION'

Paycuts in the TV industry began during the pandemic and it still continues. Actors have been complaining about it because they feel that since the situation has improved now, their monies should be restored. Sudhanshu, however, has a different perspective on the situation. He says, "There have been paycuts everywhere. The budgets have been reduced even on OTT platforms, not just on television. And I think there's an overall correction, which keeps happening every few years. It's a natural phenomenon. The pandemic affected not only our industry, but everyone across the globe." Talking further about the telly industry and insecurities

that actors go through, Sudhanshu says, "That's a part of the job. But I still feel that there are many actors who do television because they feel it gives them long-term security. OTT and alternative platforms are for actors who want to experiment with different characters." The actor is happy with the response he has got from viewers for *Anupamaa*. He says, "It is a great feeling when your project does well and people start recognising you, loving you or in my case, at one point, even hating Vanraj. The way people reacted to my character with so much hate, I considered that, too, a kind of love from the audience." — Tanvi Trivedi



Sudhanshu Pandey

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CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE

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Any brand will tell you that mapping a buyer's journey comprehensively is essential for customer retention. That said, the process of driving brand preference begins much before. Welcome to the world of influencer marketing, the new age strategy with an estimated one billion individuals identifying themselves as content creators, driving it worldwide.

### POWER OF INFLUENCERS

According to Christopher 'Chris' Roberts, an expert in brand strategy and rejuvenation, 'influencers' include influential personalities or celebrities who can impact the decisions of a large demographic. In the post-pandemic scene, the term fits even consumers who have shared their honest ratings for products, services or their experiences on review platforms. "Today, many youngsters, especially Gen Ys and Gen Zs, are happy to pay a higher price for a great experience. They rely heavily on peer reviews and ratings, which are the biggest influencers right now," he briefs.

## Cracking the collaboration code

With many takers for influencer marketing, even new and small-scale brands have a wider reach in digital times. Influential strategies drive massive sales and enhance customer experience



### KEY STRATEGIES

- Keeping the content very relatable, so that audience can connect with them
- Creating the content based on personal experiences, making it authentic
- Driving the content through product recommendations
- Producing topical content to be trending online



Influencer marketer Divya Israni says that it gives freedom for content creators to choose their own niche based on their interests. It is this flexibility that draws more individuals to pursue influencer marketing as a full-time career. "Simply put, a phone, personality and passion are all you need to enter this space. Influencer marketing works for people with varied interests as they operate on social media, a platform with scope for all content formats. Sometimes, brands prefer influencers over television or film stars as they are more relatable," Divya notes.

### DRIVING CRAZY SALES

Influencer collaborations usher in a significant rise in purchases, states Ramya Ramachandran, founder of a new-age influencer content management platform. "An advertisement is what brands want to present through their vision whereas influencer marketing personalises it based on creator's viewpoint. This makes a consumer's decision to buy extremely natural and authentic besides giving them a sense of satisfaction watching a quality piece of content. Eventually, the consumer will start following the influencer and decide to purchase products based on their suggestions," she explains.

### BOOSTING BRAND VALUE

Explaining how influencer marketing improves brand value and helps earn people's trust, Chris says that an influencer is a person who can impact the purchase decision of a prospective buyer. A business that has reviewers or influencers speaking positively of the brand, coupled with the brand delivering on its promise and value proposition, will register significant growth in its brand value. Endorsements by celebrities, who are respected and admired by consumers of a specific industry, and positive peer reviews can together enhance the word-of-mouth recommendations and have a phenomenal impact on improving purchases.

and home-based ventures are investing a fairly good amount in digital marketing. "Unlike TV, radio or newspaper advertising, digital influencer marketing is more cost-effective and has a wider reach via ad targets, which makes it a more lucrative advertising option for many small-scale, new businesses. This is because celebrity influencers charge a price, while customer reviews are more peer-to-peer, authentic and often free," Chris points out.

### CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

In the past two years, India's influencer marketing space has been seeing umpteen emerging regional content creators. Recent research shows that India currently has over 448 million active social media users who on average spend 2.25 hours every day, a majority of them being Gen Z.

Meanwhile, Chris strongly believes that no marketing or influencer endorsement will work in favour of a brand if it fails to deliver what it promises. "A negative word of mouth is five times more powerful than positive reviews. So, brands compromising on the product/service quality and passing the buck to influencers is only counterproductive," he concludes.

### EXCLUSIVE BUDGET

Ramya says that there has been an increase in the number of brands allocating substantial budgets for influencer marketing all year-round. As the strategy is measurable and real-time, marketers want to invest more funds in creating a network of influencers that are reliable and relate to the brand's requirements and aesthetics. Many small entrepreneurial

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