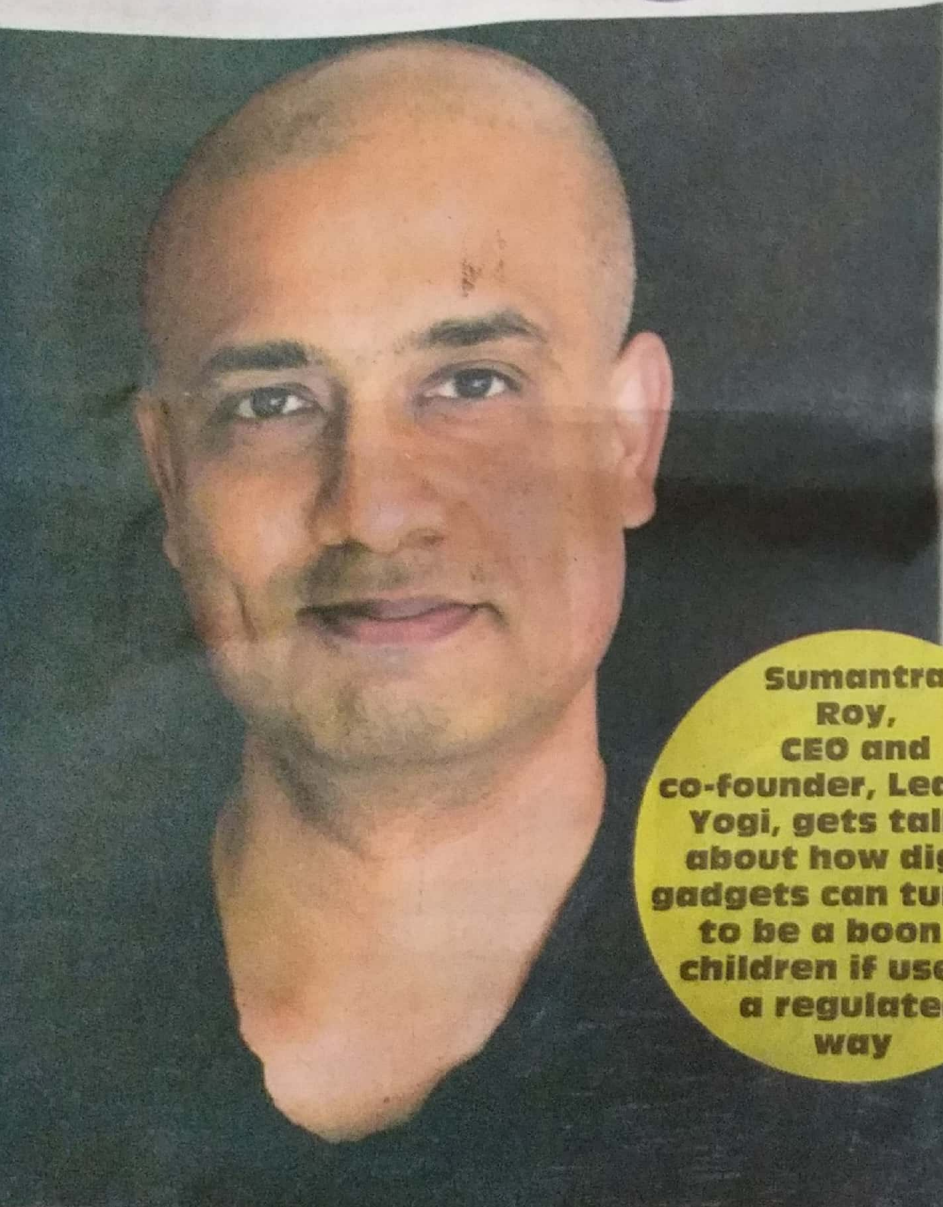


# Technologies are here to stay



**Sumantra Roy, CEO and co-founder, Learning Yogi, gets talking about how digital gadgets can turn out to be a boon for children if used in a regulated way**

**SREYA PAUL**

A successful serial entrepreneur with a diversified background in technology, education and marketing, Sumantra Roy, is the CEO of Learning Yogi. He has cofounded the organisation with creative entrepreneur and educator Rubia Braun, aiming to fulfil a childhood dream — disrupt the current education system and replace it with something that actually serves the needs of children from all strata of society, and especially the disadvantaged ones in developing countries. The company has created an epic story-driven and game-based learning platform - the Atlas Mission - to help children across different socio-economic groups teach themselves irrespective of whether they go to school. Excerpts:

**Q Both of you have come from contrasting backgrounds. Does that help in understanding kids' psyche better?**

Our diverse and contrasting backgrounds in fact help us make Learning Yogi a very unique initiative. Our individual life experiences and work experiences in different verticals help us balance both aspects of the venture - technology and education. It also helps us understand the psyche of children at a deeper level. While there are cultural sensitivities when you cross state and country borders that one must be aware of, children across the world have the same fears, joys and expectations. That is universal. Coming from two different backgrounds and cultures, we have found that to be the common ground on which we have based our venture.

**Q What are the pros and cons that you both have experienced while working in this sector and on the Atlas Mission?**

We are both very excited about the fact that parents and children who have used the Atlas Mission love what we've

created and love the improvements we keep making to it. A lot of parents have commented on how their kids have significantly improved their reading skills after playing with the Atlas Mission. The biggest challenge for us so far has been hiring the right people in our team, given how selective the process was.

**Q What made you realise that children education needs to be updated?**

Both of us have always felt that the education systems in most countries are doing a poor job of teaching children the skills they need to succeed in today's world. In spite of decades of effort, many countries haven't been able to ensure that underprivileged kids have access to high-quality education opportunities. So we started Learning Yogi in order to reinvent the education system for the 21st century.

My prior experience in media has been extremely helpful in designing a game that is both immensely engaging and educational.

**Q We are constantly being warned about the ill effects of the use of technology. How do you address this?**

We have features inside the Atlas Mission that ensure kids use our product responsibly. For instance, the game asks kids to take periodic breaks from staring at the screen and do some physical exercises before they start playing again. And kids love those exercises as well!

In addition, with our timeout feature, parents can control for how long their children are allowed to use the Atlas Mission every day. Ultimately, technology is a tool. It's how we use it that makes it good or bad. We know that there's been a fair bit of fear-mongering of late about the supposed harmful effects of phones and tablets on kids. But this is not backed by scientific research because the science clearly demonstrates exactly the opposite.

For instance, UNICEF published a study on this topic a couple of years ago. Their research conclusively showed that moderate levels of phone and tablet usage not only doesn't harm kids, but actually helps their social and mental development. So you would actually be hurting your kids by not giving them access to technology.

Plus, the reality is that these technologies are here to stay. Children are going to be

using them whether we like it or not. So we can either regulate their usage or ensure that they are using products that are beneficial to them, or leave them to use it on their own in ways that might be harmful to them.

**Q What is the vision for the company?**

Our vision is a world in which each child gets access to a high-quality education that will enable them to thrive in the 21st century, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. That's why we have also incorporated a non-profit sister organisation called the Learning Yogi Foundation. It wants to make education accessible to every child across the world, irrespective of their background. So every time a parent buys a paid subscription to the Atlas Mission, two children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be given a free copy of the product by the foundation.

**Q There are a lot of educational apps in the market - what makes your product different?**

A lot of other products are trying to gamify education. That helps, but gamifying education by simply adding a few games or game-like elements (like points, badges, etc.) to a product is not enough to keep kids engaged. Kids have lots of options in terms of the media they can consume and the video games they can play. Unless the educational product in question is more engaging than these other alternatives, they won't be using it for too long. Learning Yogi isn't gamifying education - we are turning education itself into a massive and epic video game called the Atlas Mission. With the Atlas Mission, kids learn without realising that they are learning because from their perspective, they are just playing an extremely fun and engaging game.

This game endeavours to teach children all the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century - things like creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, etc.

It also helps children understand the importance of diversity by teaching them about some of the unique cultural characteristics of different countries around the world. Working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is going to be an increasingly important skill in an interconnected world.