Brief Curriculum Vitae

Ms Shirona Patel
Wits University

Presentation Topic: Cutting through the clutter and building trust in an era of AI



Shirona Patel is the Director Communications and oversees advancement operations at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. She is a strategic communication leader with almost 30 years of experience in science communication, reputation management, internal communication, crisis communication and public engagement. She leads an award-winning communications team responsible for research and science communication, multimedia storytelling, publications, media relations, social media and institutional reputation. She enjoys translating complex scientific ideas into compelling stories that inform, inspire and influence society.

Under her leadership, the Wits Communications team received the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) Communication Award for excellence in science communication ,the Vice-Chancellor's Service Excellence Award for the Wits Centenary Campaign, and several MACE Awards. She is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Curios.ty*, Wits University's flagship research magazine.

Shirona serves as a full member of the Wits Senate, the University's highest academic decision-making body, and contributes to several strategic committees focused on governance, risk, advancement and institutional development. She is particularly interested in the intersection of artificial intelligence, creativity and storytelling, and in how emerging technologies can strengthen science communication, build public trust in research and broaden access to knowledge.

Shirona holds a Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies (cum laude) from Wits, together with several other qualifications in communication and leadership. Prior to joining Wits,
Shirona spent several years in corporate communications and Community broadcasting. During this time, she led strategic communication, public affairs and advocacy campaigns for international organisations like the World Health Organization, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, Visa, the International Labour Organization, the Kellogg South Africa and the South African Department of Health. Her work spanned health communication, research, clinical trial recruitment, public affairs and pan-African campaigns, while also delivering communication training across African universities.