



CONTENT JUNKIE

From left: Jimmy Soni; Soni with Arianna Huffington (far right) and other colleagues



SPOTLIGHT

Man of letters

American journalism's youngest poster boy, **JIMMY SONI** talks to AARTI VIRANI about reading, writing and running one of the biggest news sites on the planet

On a Monday morning at the *Huffington Post* headquarters in downtown Manhattan, backpack slung boyishly across one shoulder, managing editor Jimmy Soni leads me on a tour of the labyrinthine office. He offers a lively weekend recap: three blissful days at a friend's beach house in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. "I've never done that before," he admits. "But if you don't carve out time for yourself, this job can get all-consuming." He pauses when we arrive at a cosy, book-strewn space with sweeping views of the 380-person newsroom. "Arianna's [Huffington's] office," Soni explains, adding that his editor-in-chief is out for the day.

At 28, Soni is steering one of the world's largest news websites. Born to Rajasthani immigrant parents in Toulouse, France (where his father, a biochemical engineer, got started), and raised in suburban Illinois, Soni remembers tearing through the *Chicago Tribune* as a child. "I get stressed out when I don't read," he says. After a year-long stint as a speechwriter for the mayor of Washington, DC, Soni joined the *Huffington Post* in 2011. He was hired for

his ability to fuse journalism and technology. "I had lunch with a college friend who passed [up] the opportunity and sent it my way," confesses Soni. "I was always a planner, but I've learnt to accept the role that luck and chance can play in life—I should add that my friend showed up 45 minutes late and I had almost left."

RENAISSANCE MAN

When Huffington announced Soni's role to her team in January 2012, she described the Duke University graduate as "a man of many talents" (he's trilingual and enjoys swing dancing, for starters), and singled him out for being an exceptionally good listener. "You have two ears and one mouth and you ought to use them in that proportion," he says.

When he's not juggling the staggering array of duties that come with his job description—fostering partnerships with social media platforms, editing a chunk of the 1,600 articles churned out on a daily basis and expanding the brand's international reach—Soni turns to karate and marathon training for a few hours every week. He's convinced that repetitive physical activity forces his brain, typically stretched in an assortment of directions, to think differently. "One of my favourite writers, TJ Stiles, has a black belt in karate, and Ernest Hemingway was a boxer," he adds.

Then there's his social life. "That's a trickier one," Soni says, self-consciously. "I'm single and it's tough to date when you have the kind of job I do... the person you're seeing needs to be endlessly forgiving," he continues. "I may need to put that on hiatus for a little while."

PASSAGE TO INDIA

For the moment, Soni's razor-sharp focus is devoted to the *Huffington Post's* upcoming India edition, poised for an early 2014 launch. "I'll be hands-on with it, partly because I'm involved in pretty much everything we do and because India's especially close to my heart," he reveals. "Even though I've strayed from my roots a bit, the lens through which I think about the world tends to blend the ancient with the modern," he asserts. "And there are few places where that is done more successfully than India." ■