
Branding India: Problems and Issues

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Abstract

Every nation has its own brand. India never tried to develop a unique brand of ourselves and was blunted by aping the west and its practices in frenzy. Our infrastructure is cracking and we do not have a sense of national identity. There is a dearth of trained human resources. We continue to divide the country by caste and creed, employ child labour and disempower women. The brand of India being a land of primitive snake charmers; poor infrastructure; corruption; poverty so strongly embedded that it is very difficult to project a positive image of brand India. Problem arises when some prominent subbrands like Bollywood, Indian cuisines, Kolhapuri Chappals, Kancheepuram saris, Goa, Taj, spirituality, Yoga, etc. overshadow the mother brand. Regional leaders of present India like Laloo Yadav, Chandra Babu, Naidu, Mayawati among others - most drawn from the lower castes, aggressively defend their own class and regional interests and do not have a coherent view of Indian identity. The demolition of Babri masjid, the attack on Parliament, Akshardham, Gujarat Riots, all have had an impact on Indian brand. All these factors contribute towards not building the desirable brand for India. India needs to market itself as the land of brainpower and opportunity, proven by the fruits of its heritage and technology.

Introduction

The brand is a thought, a thought that rests in the minds of individuals. Brand is a name and it creates an image regarding what others perceive; it is a one's personality and can make one stand out from others who are doing or saying similar thing a crowded market place. Brand management is the art, science, and philosophy of managing brands in an individual's head. Branding is a sophisticated process that puts together and sustains a complex mixture of attributes and values, many of which are intangible.

Country brand is the picture, the representation, and the stereotype that individuals attach to products, services or individuals of a particular country. Every nation has its own brand. One talks of Japanese technology, German engineering, Italian fashion, French wine or Brazilian soccer. Creation of a brand or even repositioning a country is not a totally new phenomenon. This has taken place many times in the history of mankind. The Great Egyptian Civilizations, the triumph of Alexander, the Great, Europeans expeditors and Chinese were all giving their country a brand, a position. What modern countries are doing now is not much different from what these countries did i.e. branding their countries and creating a country brand. What US, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Malaysia etc. have done is a conscious and concerted effort towards creating a unique identity, a brand beyond compare. Now-a- days, branding is an economic need, political need, egotistical need and competitive need. Experts argue that country brand plays the role of an umbrella brand and provide equity support to everything, offered by a country. Every marketer would vouch that it is much more complicated to create a brand for a country than for something that is there for sale. The keys to creating brand for a country are opportunities available for it, responses to these opportunities and the political will.

India - Need for Brand Building

With the globalization and opening up of global markets, even India is realizing the importance of brand creation for India, as a nation. Branding India is a task. If India does not engage in proactive branding, it runs the risk of being positioned by its competitors to their advantage, making it even more difficult for India to control its economic destiny. It's high time that India understands the tricks of brand building and pull up its sleeves. Graduating from mere unbranded manufacturers to brand owners will help India to build its national wealth. If a company from a rich country sells brands to consumers in a poor country like India, there is a risk of exploitation and a further widening of wealth gap and it leads to exploitation. But, if a company from a poor country like India sells brands to consumers in a rich country, the overall balance begins to be redressed and justice begins to be done. Building "Made in India" would enable the Indian manufacturers to find a place for Indian products in foreign markets, hence leading to the development of India, as a nation.

Other reason as to why India should adopt branding is the subtle dependence of foreign direct investment flows on the country brand. Certainly a lot of research is undertaken by MNC's before venturing into investing in a particular country. Here the countries' brand or brand comes into play. In this context, it is promise that the branded country is an ideal destination to park one's funds; It's a promise that the investment, made would be safe enough; it's a promise that the country has cutting edge infrastructure and man power requirement. There are so many examples as to how branded countries like Dubai, Singapore etc. have succeeded in attracting FDIs much larger than India, though India has an edge in terms of resource and man power. Building Indian brand would enable us to attract reasonable FDI, hence leading to establishment of industries by MNCs. The same would in turn ensure employment opportunities and generation of funds.

Indian Brand building - Problems and issues

When today one says 'India', does the word still evoke brands of Gandhi, poverty, illiteracy, developing nation, corruption, sadhus etc.? Or does it recall the brands of skilled IT professionals, ace fashion designers,

women entrepreneurs, tourist destinations? If India were to make the most of its brand name, it needs to tune into the basic approach to positioning as laid down by Al Ries and Jack Trout "Not to create something new and different, but to manipulate what's already up there in the mind and to retie the connection that already exists." India, the brand can be successful only when what is already there in the mind about India is coupled with what is emerging, positive, appealing and unknown. Developing brand is a task that requires cooperation from people from diverse fields. The brand has to be communicated not only through quality of products, but also through human deeds, words and behavior.

India went wrong in projecting itself as a brand of significance in the world tapestry of understanding. India has touted for long many years the "Made in India" line, a line that comes into prominence during Nehruvian era. Pandit Nehru was besotted with production and productivity. Nehru's vision encapsulated an India that would compete with the rest of the world on the same parameters that the rest of world, progressed with. The Nehruvian plan for the country was a me- too approach paper that had us setting up manufacturing facilities all over and focusing on agricultural productivity that was higher than what was being achieved. We copied the model that was at play in the rest of the developed world in those early days of our independence. Perhaps we never tried to develop a unique brand of ourselves and were blunted by aping the west and its practices in frenzy.

The country is embedded in an agricultural economy. If the rain fails, the economy is in doldrums. If the rains are bountiful, the economy perks up. We do not have water conservation system in place, given that we have draught and flood, occurring on a regular basis. Our highways don't crisscross the country for effective transport of goods. The state of power, telecom and education infrastructure in India leave much to be desired. The legal and regulatory system is very poor in India and hence fails to build credibility among investors. Unlike the US, which has infrastructure and communication conduits, our infrastructure is cracking. Unlike Japan, we do not have a sense of national identity. We continue to divide the country by caste and creed into vote banks. We continue to employ child labour, to disempower women.

While India sure has an abundance of English speaking trainable human resources, there is a dearth of trained human resources. This can be largely attributed to the fact that a proper training infrastructure is lacking. In-house training efforts meet with little success with increasing attrition levels on account of poaching.

India is still a 21st century paradox, a modern day anomaly to some. The brand of India being a land of primitive snake charmers; cattle; tantriks; sadhus; poor road and rail links; poor water and electricity facilities; a nation with rampant corruption; a nation with almost 30% of residents, living below poverty line; a nation which is unable to provide basic amenities of life like food, shelter and clothing to its residents; a nation of lethargic residents who prefer to waste away their time in unproductive activities is so strongly embedded that it is very difficult to project a positive image of brand India. This is despite the fact that India has transformed as a nation and made developments in diverse fields. India has been the melting pot of different civilizations, religions, cultures and practices. They have created the concept of India as the three blind men, trying to describe an elephant. It lacked the fierce nationalism that created post war Japan as brand. Therefore, when asked even today, people say that India cannot be described without parentheses like a growing modern nation. No single brand emerges and some prefer to look India as a kaleidoscope of diffused brands.

A country like India where there is a multitude of languages and cultures, synthesizing opportunities for brand building; responses to these opportunities and political will pose a major challenge. India is a country with large diversities which houses people with different religions, caste and creed, speaking different languages and practicing different cultures. No doubt India has so many sub brands like Bollywood, Indian cuisines, Kolhapuri Chappals, Kancheepuram saris, Taj, spirituality, Yoga etc. Sometimes regional considerations weigh far more heavily than national considerations. States like Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala etc. have been proactively going in for state branding. Andhra Pradesh has branded itself as Tech-savvy, capable of hosting international events, creating and encouraging sport persons with great infrastructure. Kerala has been actively promoting and positioning itself as the foremost tourist destination whereas Goa's popularity has

made tourists visit this spot without even knowing that it is an integral part of sovereign India. To some extent these sub brands have a good effect on the country brand. But, problem arises when these brands overshadow the mother brand. Various sub brands are putting in individual efforts to project themselves and does not allow India to position itself as Brand India. In situations like this, we lose out on the synergy benefit.

We could never built upon "Made in India" brand, although we tried to hit the global markets with this line. This "Made in India" line was faulty. The Indian products were not able to live up to the highest standards of quality that the international customers expected. The Indian suppliers never had the long-term strategic vision and could never perceive the importance of developing relations with foreign buyer by providing them desirable quality of high standard. Their products have often been found far below international standards. They failed to implement the international quality control procedures and standards because of lack of facilities, close-minded ideologies and callous attitude. Their main focus had been on providing cheap products to the domestic customers through sub standardization and mass production. They tried to take the foreign buyer for a ride and earn profits in the foreign market with the same attitude. But, foreign buyer has been too aware and particular about product quality, delivery schedule and production facilities. The result has been failure of Indian product, at times. The "Made in India" label become a liability for product recognition, low quality and inferior performance. And then came a time when the Indian products would hit the global shore, but the "Made in India" label had to be removed. Walk into Harrods and you will find more than 80 products made in India. Not more than 5 of them actually have the "Made in India" label. The rest pass off as superior imports from a more reliable destination.

Liberalization did not come to us from a benign democratic, forward thinking government. We were coerced into it. At that time, several foreign investors came to the country seeking opportunities. Many of them wrapped up their tents and left. Because what we preached, we did not practice. There is a huge gap between what is projected and what reality is, and hence the whole branding process has gone

haywire. During brand building, many managers are tempted to window dress. Diplomacy in communicating is good to some extent, but brand managers should understand that there is very thin line between hypocrisy and diplomacy. Hypocrisy in branding is myopic and dangerous. Sooner or later, window dressed brands are sure to be punished by the customers. We professed that we had opened up our economy, but the mandarins created enough roadblocks to stall the promised initiative. We need to learn from this to brand India in global market. Deliver on promise. The perception at present of the Indian Govt. and its mandarins is that its corrupt and self serving. This is reflected in the scams, being unearthed by media.

The events, happening in the country have a huge impact on the national brand. Sometimes irrational acts can ruin the years of branding efforts. The demolition of Babri masjid, the attack on Parliament, Akshardham, Gujarat Riots, all have had an impact on Indian brand. More recently the rape of an international diplomat and a student tarnished India's Global brand. India seems, on the face of it, poised between such choices. On the one hand, there is a shrink-wrap, software-package India, where 'brain arbitrage' is the new spice trade and where India is a global brand name advertising the world's electronic 'back office'. On the other, there is a self-inflated, venomous redefinition of India in terms of the ideology of *Hindutva* - where, with mobile phone in one hand and trishul in the other, we see modern technology and medieval weapons turned to lethal ends. A choice has to be made between India as Brand Software or as Brand Saffron, between the promise of Bangalore and the threat of Gujarat.

There are three important lines of division and conflict in the coming decades: those of the regions and regional states, of caste, and of religion. These represent competing conceptions or visions of India, each of which is challenging the vision set in place by the founders. As such they suggest alternative brands of what this nation might hope to be. Regional leaders of present India like Laloo Yadav, Naidu, Mayawati among others - most drawn from the lower castes, aggressively defend their own class and regional interests. They do not have a coherent view of Indian identity and operate with more restricted horizons. Take their picture of the economy: they see this

basically as a cluster of regional units, each engaged in zero-sum relations with one another, and with the Centre (the caste parties also operate with this picture). In terms of culture, they are also parochial - devoted to tending their own vernacular gardens. The fundamental problem with this view of India is that it offers no coherent national conception of what India is. Threat perceptions by potential clients in the wake of socio-political disturbances in India are viewed at micro levels. The cross border tensions and terrestrial issues are viewed as a threat to India as a country. This raises a question about India on the locational factor safety scale and hence make foreigners skeptical about the stability of India.

All these factors contribute towards not building the desirable brand for India.

India's Brand Building

India needs to market itself as the land of brainpower and opportunity, proven by the fruits of its heritage and technology. It could brand Asian wisdom, values and life styles and modern quality goods and services. However, we need to keep in mind that branding will not work if quality falters or fails. The branding challenge at hand is to surround brand India with positive symbols and brands, thereby enhancing consumer perceptions of quality. Building a reputable brand with unique and diverse attributes mandates a long-term vision, along with a team oriented commitment. It will require Indian companies and government to understand how brand India is cultivated, enhanced and maintained. Only by developing and nurturing Indian intellectual strengths and leadership and instilling a sense of national pride in our citizens, we will be able to collectively build brand India.

Essentially branding is based on perception and positioning. Hence, what India requires is an effective public relation pitch to set the branding exercise in motion. Therefore, in order to be successful, brand India has to resourcefully create positive associations between a product/ services and an Indian brand in the minds of the international customer. To project a positive brand of India, its politicians, businessmen, media, sports ambassadors, Diaspora, artists, diplomats and more importantly its citizens should project India as a place, where good things of the

entire world's are manifested. Branding India is the job of brand gurus, but the path to follow for better results may be the time tested path of community, ethnic group and geographical group skill and knowledge exploitation. The intrinsic strength of Indian brand may lie there and may give the immortality that all brands crave for.

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