

Brand Biryani

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Interbrand

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India has always been a mystery to Westerners. It is full of conundrums and contradictions. It defies logic. Many see it as a haven for spirituality and purity. And yet, although a god may reside in every house, street corner, taxi, and shop, the country is enveloped in rampant consumerism that is embraced by all, and ignored by none.

The more one delves into India, the more confusing and intriguing it becomes. If we look at statistics alone, it is mind-boggling. We recently asked an Indian client how many customers they had. The casual response was 400 million. Holy Cow! (Cows, incidentally, are still seen wandering around many towns.) That is more than the entire population of the United States of America, and not even half of India.

Dig deeper and the statistics are even more jaw dropping. Every year the Indian economy grows by over 8 percent, the equivalent of the entire GDP of Australia. And each year, more engineers graduate than all the European countries put together. These are pretty impressive statistics, considering in 1947 barely 12 percent of the population could write their own name.

Jaguar, Land Rover, Tetley Tea, White, and MacKay whiskey are well known household names here in the UK. But, less well known is that they are all owned and managed by Indian companies. India is more than simply booming – it is literally exploding. Indians are revelling in their newfound wealth and consumerism after decades of frugality and protectionism. They have money and they want to spend it.

India is unlike anywhere else. It is a unique country crammed full of possibilities, opportunities, people, and promise. Bollywood may seem an anathema to us here in the UK – the glittering saris, the quirky dance routines, the moustached baddies versus the clean-cut heroes, and the visceral techno-color that melts the retinas – but it captures India uniquely.

Through Bollywood, we can see India's hopes, dreams, suspension of reality, and color of life. Take the "Indian Premier League" or IPL. Bollywood stars bid exorbitant sums of money for their favorite cricket teams in a glorious celebration. Their enthusiasm for the

game and has changed the way that the world looks at cricket.

So how can brands compete in this mad world, and what are the keys to success? Well there is definitely no silver bullet, but Interbrand's recent work in India has given us a few pointers.

Be functional and original

There are many brands that are vying for the Indian rupee, but the brands that have adapted are those that are winning. They understand that being exotic is not enough—there must be substance beneath the style. Just check out the Indian driver. On the side of the road, with nothing more than a hammer and brute force, he fixes the Tata truck that ploughs up and down the county. Nokia is another great example. One of its best-selling products is a simple dustproof phone, short on functions, long on battery life. It would not even make it past the playground gates in Europe. Yet, in India it's perfect. Its dustproof features are highly practical; its torch feature is great for power cuts; and its long battery life is even better. Wrap it up in a great ad, and Nokia has an instant success.

Be optimistic – celebrate life

Indians are comfortable with chaos, confusion, and imperfections. They feel at home in a seething crowd where we would feel lost and hassled. In their culture, life is a journey that never ends – it's always flowing. Those brands that capture and celebrate this will connect with the new emerging consumer. Godrej, a company with a 125-year heritage producing everything from hair dye to typewriters, survives because it embraces all that is Indian. It celebrates and thinks beyond just this year and into the next millennium. Their brand essence of "Brighter Living" captures this perfectly: the optimism for the future, the changing nature of India, and the color of India.

Reflect the past – project the future

Despite India accelerating towards the future, there is still a sense of worth and self, and a need to do the right thing. India may be one of the youngest nations in the world, but it is founded on (arguably) the oldest civilization. Himalaya is a small Indian cosmetic brand but it is growing fast – why? It is growing because it uses the traditions of Ayurveda, a 5000 year-old Indian system of medicine to create a new and differentiated product.

Maximalism, not minimalism

Himalaya studied ancient texts and natural indigenous herbs. It then subjected these herbs to modern pharmacological safety tests to produce new drugs, products, and therapies for modern living today.

Maximalism, not minimalism

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, if you are not colorful, you just won't cut it in India. India is just too noisy and brash. To Indians, simplicity is boring and uninteresting. Pared back minimalism does not work. It is seen as frugal and unengaging.

So India really is a biryani of ideas, color, morality, and chaos – charming and dumfounding all at the same time. Just as you try to understand a little more, something surprising always pops up.

But back to Bollywood: arguably, the biggest movie star in India is Amitabh Bachchan. Known as "The Big B" to millions of adoring fans, he has appeared in hundreds of movies and graced a thousand billboards. And yet, he has never kissed a girl on screen. It sounds odd to us, but not in India – further proof that India is full of surprises.



Himalaya



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