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## Indian brands must establish national advantages

At a national level, the Indian Brand Equity Foundation, created by the Confederation of Indian Industry, is trumpeting the cause of "brand India" and recent successes include the "India Everywhere" initiative at the high-profile World Economic Forum in Davos.

BY STEVEN MANALLACK

India has the largest number of brands in Asia and has the second highest number in the world, but how many Indian brands truly resonate around the globe? Certainly Chinese brands are starting to become known - with one, China Mobile, making a sparkling entry at No 4 in the global top 20 brands.

Have Indian business leaders forgotten the advice of Professor Michael Porter, professor of strategy, Harvard Business School, that, "Countries like brands must seize the opportunity of establishing national advantages"? The current economic drive in India is just the time that organisations and companies need to "seize the opportunity" to create a branding that will impact for decades ahead.

At a national level, the Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), created by the Confederation of Indian Industry, is trumpeting the cause of "brand India" and recent successes include the "India Everywhere" initiative at the high-profile World Economic Forum in Davos, and the current "Opportunity India" campaign. IBEF has got the balance right as it pursues an Indian brand that is a unique blend of tradition and modernity, rooted in values and ethics. I have said before that western audiences are hungry for traditions, spirituality, values - so this is heading the right way.

But the real gap in brand creation is among India's leading corporations, especially those impacting in the West. How does this problem show up?

- Strong global brands make an emotional connection with their audience. How many Indian brands succeed at this?

- Powerful brands create a "personality" that builds relationships with the market... and how many Indian brands have personality?

Mark Ritson is associate professor of marketing at Melbourne Business School, and he says, "A brand's value can be calculated in many different ways, including the positive association consumers have for the brand, the premium they are prepared to pay for it, and, internally, the increased loyalty and performance of the staff who work for it. But perhaps the most important measure of brand equity is the financial value of the brand to the company that owns it."

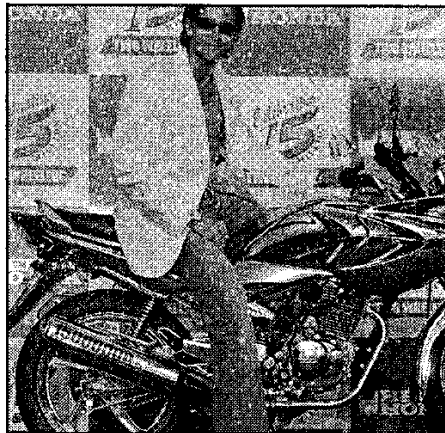
Coca-Cola remains the world's most valuable brand, estimated by Interbrand at \$67 billion, though other brand experts such as Millward Brown Optimor value Microsoft even higher. But think also of General Electric, Wal-Mart, Google, IBM, Toyota, McDonald's, Citigroup and BMW and you are recalling brands that leverage the value of their relationships

and reputations.

China is working hard at business branding. Finding its way onto the Millward global brand table of the top 20 is a Chinese brand - China Mobile - with a brand equity estimated at \$39 billion. No Indian brand makes the top 20. China Mobile has 260 million subscribers and adds four million new subscribers per month.

None of these brands achieved prominence by accident - they all worked hard to first identify and then build their special brand. Did you know that most brands in the Millward Top 100 have marketing and communication experts on their boards?

The Gallup Organisation is one of the global



Actor and Hero Honda Brand Ambassador Hrithik Roshan poses on a Hero Honda's 'All-Chrome' Karizma motorcycle. AFP

experts on "brand" and they believe that a brand reflects the nature of emotions and human relationships that underpin business. Gallup claims there is:

"...conclusive evidence that organisations can only reach their full potential by emotionally engaging their employees and customers."

Developing a powerful brand goes further. Gallup describes keeping customers as a "brand marriage" and it says creating this is not just a matter of products, low prices, great advertising, stunning packaging or a superb location - these must all work together - says Gallup, but the total brand experience involves adding to the experience of dealing with you so that "emotional connections" are made.

The point is that these emotional connections are powerful and often long-lasting, they become the

"ties that bind" the supplier with the customer.

But to create a strong brand, your company needs to start by giving serious answers to these key questions:

- What do I want others to know about me?
- What do I want to keep to myself?
- What do I want to limit to select people or groups?

- How many of my attitudes will I open up about?
- What is our personality?

According to the Gallup Organisation, a strong brand image is created when the target market believes that the brand:

- Listens to me, cares for me
- Reliably delivers what it promises
- Is always interesting by being different or innovative

- Wraps up our dealings smoothly and simply
- Is happy, and projects this happiness

Research has shown that when businesses lose customers, 70 per cent are lost because they do not like the human side of doing business with that organisation. In a nutshell, that is why your brand development needs to focus on warm human qualities such as caring, listening and projecting happiness. None of this lack of branding should take away from the incredible success that the Indian business community has achieved. For example, for the first time, two Indian business leaders have made it to Time magazine's "Top 100 Most Influential People" list. They are Nandan Nilekan, CEO, Infosys, and Vikram Akula, founder of SKS Microfinance, a business that funnels venture capital to the poor.

Now would be a great time for Indian businesses, large and small, to recruit brand and communication expertise at board and senior management level, and to create a brand taskforce that evaluates where their image stands today, what elements will help become stronger and what are the ingredients of good branding that can add real value to the bottom line, improve employee morale, enhance recruiting and support raising capital.

Brand development done this way is not a cost, nor is it frivolous; instead, this kind of brand development can strengthen your relationship with the people who matter and thereby give the business a stronger base. The Indian economic boom gives business leaders a 'once in a lifetime, perhaps once in a century, opportunity to build brands that last. But it won't happen unless you make it, and the first step is to add some real emotion and personality to the often dull world of business communication.

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