



**Breakfast Roundtable: Insights into India**  
**08.30am, 15 October 2019**  
**Marx Room, Quo Vadis Club**  
**Soho, London**





## Meeting Notes

### Attendee List

First name	Last name	Position	Company
Alaina	Crystal	Deputy Head of Strategy	AMV BBDO
Amar	Mistry	Account Manager – India	City of London Corp.
Amen	Yared	Business Development Executive	ESCP Europe
Charlotte	Rogers	Senior Writer	Marketing Week
Jill	Heller	New Business Manager	Creative Culture
John	Smythe	Advisory Board	Creative Culture
Kevin	McCole	Chief Operating Officer	UK India Business Council
Liz	Walker	General Counsel	BT Global Services
Marina	Belik	Group Account Director	Gutenberg Global
Mélanie	Chevalier	CEO and Founder	Creative Culture
Mohan	Krishna	Associate Director	Changepond Technologies
Nick	Flynn	Global Franchise Manager	Holland & Barrett
Nick	Jordan	CEO	Trade Horizons
Paul	Duncanson	Non-Executive Director	Creative Culture
Paul	Squirrell	Director	thenetworkone
Pehlu	Ghotra	International Relations Officer	ICCO
Peter	Stephenson-Wright	UK Director of Executive Education & Business Development	ESCP Europe
Raj	Singh	CEO	Innotatio Ltd.
Rob	Morbin	General Manager	ICCO
Subhash	Ghosh	Founder & CEO	Lemon Advisers UK
Sudha	Singh	Senior Communications Specialist	Self-employed





## Introductions

To open the event, Paul Duncanson (PD) welcomed all attendees to the breakfast roundtable. He then asked for everyone to briefly introduce themselves.

PD invited Kevin McCole (KM), the Chief Operating Officer of the UK India Business Council, and Sudha Singh (SS), a senior communications specialist, to share some of their knowledge about the social, political and economic background of India. KM provided an overview of contemporary Indian economy and politics and SS gave a high-level introduction to the media and communications field within India.

## General Discussion Points

### Politics and Economics

KM explained that in some ways, Indian politics are similar to US politics in that there is a strong federal government with two major parties. On the other hand, Indian politics are comparable to EU politics because there are 29 states in India with various regional political parties and many differing cultures within them.

While India has a president, KM noted that this is largely ceremonial, and the power of decision-making rests in the hands of the Prime Minister. India's current Prime Minister is Narendra Modi, who has provided hope and optimism to the Indian people and is largely seen as a "clean" politician. He is both a nationalist and Hindu, and has gained the loyalty of many common people across the country by assuring them that he has India's interests at heart (and specifically with regards to terrorism). Modi has impacted India in two major ways: 1) demonetisation, which has challenged the historical cash economy and 2) the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax in 2017, which created a single taxation market in India.

Sustainability has been at the heart of the government's agenda. They introduced a law in 2015, whereby businesses must spend 2% of their profit in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or risk being fined and even imprisonment of the employees responsible. This is largely an important topic for the upper and middle classes but less so for the rest of the population.

In terms of India's economic situation, this decade has seen a 6% annual growth, and according to the World Bank Report, India should become \$5 trillion dollar economy by 2024. Goldman Sachs reported that by 2030, India should be the third biggest economy in the world. While the economy is on the rise, it is currently suffering due to a credit crunch (particularly in the North of the country): in the past decade, significant sums of money have been loaned to large corporations, impacting the economy's growth and decreasing consumer confidence. Unemployment is at a 45-year high.

Indian society is constantly moving and evolving. The country has transformed through the onset of digitalisation. Today, nearly all villages have connectivity, which has empowered many more people to set up local businesses.

### Indian culture

There are many positive aspects of the current cultural landscape in India for marketers to be excited about. Firstly, the population of people between the ages of 15-65 is greater than all other age ranges,





which provides great opportunities. It is also worth noting that Indians tend to be aspirational consumers.

When it comes to diversity, India is still a traditional society. However, throughout the country, notably in rural India, women are becoming much more entrepreneurial. In media and advertising, women are also often in high positions within companies, although it was noted that more of a conscious effort should be made with regards to gender representation in larger, international businesses.

Thanks to the federal system and to the vast size and population of India, there is not one culture that dominates the nation. Rather, there are many different cultures, languages and trends within the whole country, meaning that one comms platform cannot accommodate the wide variety of cultural diversity in India. Content must be customised for regional cultures.

### Main advertising channels

Print and television are the dominant advertising channels in India. In fact, print media is still growing at a fast rate, with 70,000 print publications being published on an ongoing basis. Out of the top ten print publications in the country, only one is in English (the Times of India). Publications in regional languages have much more impact than publications in English and their growth is driven through advertising. The same trend applies to television: regional programmes and channels are more influential than foreign ones or those in English.

The Internet and social media in India are rapidly becoming more and more popular, which is consistent with trends seen across the globe. However, print and television still tend to have more of an impact on the majority of the population, setting India apart as a unique comms market. Despite the increasing use of the internet, the government is still the biggest advertiser in the country and uses television and print publications in the main to communicate.

The young population is targeted through the internet, particularly via mobile devices. For marketers, there is a major opportunity to engage with Tier 2 and Tier 3 consumers via mobile, as almost everyone has a mobile device (most people having never owned a desktop or laptop first).

### Use of social media

Younger generations in India are digitally savvy and determined to get the best content because they have always had access to it. People of all ages and backgrounds use WhatsApp. In fact, it has been used (and misused, e.g. spreading false news) so much that WhatsApp now prevents people from forwarding content to more than five people in the Indian market. TikTok is widely used, and there are a huge number of TikTok influencers.

Modi communicates with the public via social media and does not engage with mainline media as much. Instead, he uses Twitter and content platforms to interact with constituents, which is also a new trend.





### Doing business in India

Experiences vary when setting up a business in India – some of our roundtable attendees noted that it is a difficult process while others said it is a simple one. One thing that is agreed upon is that access to regulators is key, whether that be tax regulators, policy regulators, or building regulators. Liz Walker (LW) even noted that the telecoms industry is still regulated by an act from 1896, which clearly includes no form of digital communications. It is difficult to understand all regulations when rules are constantly evolving, so businesses must be attentive to potential changes in regulations that might impact their business plans. Invest India was recommended as a reliable source to assist with setting up a business in India.

Indian business culture includes close interpersonal relationships, with frequent face-to-face meetings and relations beyond the workplace. It is common for colleagues to be invited to friend and family gatherings. Indian business meetings often tend to be friendly and warm, but that does not necessarily mean that there is agreement with everything that happens; rather, it means that Indian business culture is friendly and interpersonal relationships contribute to work projects as much as the quality of work does.

The relationships between brands and agencies in India are also very close.

### Tips for brands

Very few products have success across all of India because there are so many smaller cultures within the country overall. Three key topics relate to many people in India: religion, films and sports (cricket).

If brands demonstrate an understanding of real Indians' local experiences, they will have greater success. However, due to the diversity of the country, it is difficult to be successful trying to push a product for all.

Maggi Noodles, an instant noodles brand, paid the price of miscommunication two years ago. While it was one of the country's biggest and favourite brands, they had a factory safety check in which it was revealed that their product (targeted to families and loved by children) had high levels of lead. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India even issued a brief ban on the products. Crisis management wasn't handled in a timely manner and it was devastating for the brand, which lost a huge share of the market.

Mélanie Chevalier concluded the meeting by asking roundtable attendees to share some do's and don'ts when it comes to operating and communicating in India.

#### **Do:**

- Tap into the global vision of young people, but bring local intelligence
- Understand the division between generations
- Establish real connections with stakeholders in order to avoid later crisis management
- Seek help and support, because India is not a short-term business venture and it is vital to understand the market over the course of time
- Target the vertical market if your business is in the SME sector
- Use multiple languages in print and visual media
- Be patient as business is something that takes time to develop through a relationship building exercise





**Don't:**

- Be arrogant
- Be afraid
- Be surprised, because things will always change
- Underestimate the talent available in India, particularly in the tech sector

The meeting concluded at 10.30am.

