



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2025

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

FROM TRADE WARS TO GLOBAL BRANDS: WHAT REALLY SHAPES GLOBAL BRANDS?

- *Ishita Jha*

In this era, frequently marked by digital revolutions and geopolitical shifts, global brands are required to adapt to versatility, international perspectives, and robust operations. The best way to notice this shift is to look at the country India, which has a market potential of around 1.4 billion consumers and Western frameworks often encounter the local dynamics.

The established and traditional frameworks of brand management, which were built around an aligned narrative and streamlined experiences, are now being challenged by two dynamic factors: trade wars that shatter global supply chains and social media that have completely reshaped the brand image process. This shift calls out in a country like India for both the grassroots level initiatives and global conglomerates to reinvent their vision and approaches to survive this intersection of these two forces.

THE GEOPOLITICAL RESHUFFLING: TRADE WARS AS BRAND CATALYSTS

When the US-China tariff battles imposed duties on Chinese imports above 145 % in 2025, brands were looking for other options and turned their attention to India's factories. This wasn't considered just a logistical shift; instead, it was presenting a rewiring of how the global brands think about risk, regional partnerships and resilience.

For many years, Tiruppur's textile clusters, which used to operate near capacity, supplied Western retailers ranging from fast fashion to the premium section. The region's 8,000 garment units have around 60,000 workers who used to process orders worth \$6 billion annually. The imposition of the tariffs led to production falling to a rate of 15%. But, definitely, the companies that had earlier only invested in quality certifications, sustainable manufacturing processes and enhanced logistics found themselves less affected, rather than brands that were desperate to diversify their supply chains.

The champions weren't those with the lowest costs, but instead those who understood that the modern partners need reliable partners and not just mere suppliers. This shift of the trade wars revealed an interesting fact for all: in times of geopolitical conflicts, global brands value reliability and transparency over pure cost optimisation.

Now, Reliance Jio had a different approach to this situation, as it had transformed itself from a domestic telecom disruptor to a leading global player in the market. The company changed the whole game of Indian telecommunications by providing the users with rock-bottom prices and gained the trust of 470 million subscribers in less than a decade. So, the company, after this trade war, had packaged its digital infrastructure expertise to partners in Southeast Asia and Africa, where the issues and concerns about Chinese technology have created opportunities for trusted partners.

All of these studies have in common depict how the successful and established brands approach global extension. They build ecosystems of mutual benefits with local partners and communities rather than just trying to dominate the market by scaling alone. This clearly shows that, as we live in a multipolar world, sustainable access requires cultural fluency and local engagement rather than just focusing on operational excellence.

THE LOCALISATION REVOLUTION: BEYOND TRANSLATION TO TRANSFORMATION

The true meaning of localisation in India is not just limited to linguistic adaptation; instead, it requires cultural transformation. This goes far beyond translating the taglines or adapting to the product formations; it would require brands to analyse the tangled religious, social and regional dynamics that drive the consumer behaviour across the Indian markets.

The perfect example to understand this is the case study of McDonald's India, which earlier used to provide beef in its menu but later removed it to not hurt the religious sensibilities of the consumers. Instead, they created McAloo Tikki Burger, which was initially inspired by Mumbai's famous Vada Pav, turning the diet restrictions into a source of national pride. This burger had become so popular that its consumption had overpowered McDonald's global staples.

The Diwali campaigns of the company had further improved this approach by not greeting the users with the typical messages of Diwali; instead, they had crafted campaigns of celebrating every "Diwali Moment" with family, friends, colleagues and other social circles. This illustrates that it understood the complex social fabric of the Indian festivals and connected with the consumers.

Again, when Coca-Cola acquired the Thums Up brands, it reflected how once you connect locally with the audience, then that's the final motive to have a customer base in a country like India. When Coca-Cola re-entered the Indian market in 1993, it had a choice of converting Indian

consumers to prefer Coca-Cola's less carbonated, sweeter product or to accept the local preference for a bolder taste. They chose the other option to acquire Thums Up and keep its manufacturing different. Today, Thumbs Up has outsold the Coca-Cola brand in India, becoming a billion-dollar brand.

HOW EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS WIN OVER OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The role of how emotional connections can even superimpose operational excellence can be seen and understood through the case study example of Flipkart and Amazon in India. Amazon came to the Indian market by giving major advantages like global scale, technological sophistication and expert e-commerce expertise. Still, Flipkart, though being a young startup as compared to Amazon, has stronger market leadership.

Flipkart has always understood that building e-commerce in India isn't just about efficient logistics buildup; instead, it's about creating culturally resonant shopping experiences. The platform offers vernacular interfaces to its users, which support Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi and Bengali, making online shopping widely accessible even to non-English speakers.

The company's festival-themed sales events have transformed shopping from a mere transactional activity into a cultural celebration. The campaigns during Diwali and Dussehra have been just discount events; instead, they have shown how they recognise the culture of Indian traditions with regional customisations that create an emotional connection between the users.

Though Amazon's premium positioning has won the urban landscape, it has struggled to create a space at the grassroots level, which Flipkart has done. Despite excellent logistics and customer service, Amazon is considered more distant and less aligned with Indian sensibilities. The contrast clearly depicts how emotional branding of a company can even cover the loss of operational disadvantages, mostly in culturally complex markets.

THE INDIAN TEMPLATE FOR GLOBAL SUCCESS

India stands out as a unique and perfect combination of scale, cultural richness, regulation complications and versatility, making it an ideal example for testing global brand strategies. The lessons to be learned include platform swiftness, community engagement, cultural fluency, and operational resilience, which are the most considered factors for brand relevance in complex markets.

It's not the production capabilities or the massive money spent on advertising; instead, it's the Ability to navigate through the complexities in the market, which promises authenticity, quickly respond to the disruptions and foster meaningful relationships across cultural borders.

Those companies that have mastered these lessons from a country like India will have a greater possibility to survive in a market which is going to be a more interconnected and scattered market competition, where success wouldn't just be defined by global reach but instead by connecting locally with the audience. This dynamic shift has set up a breakthrough area, with India being the perfect example, which has been showing the way forward for this trend.