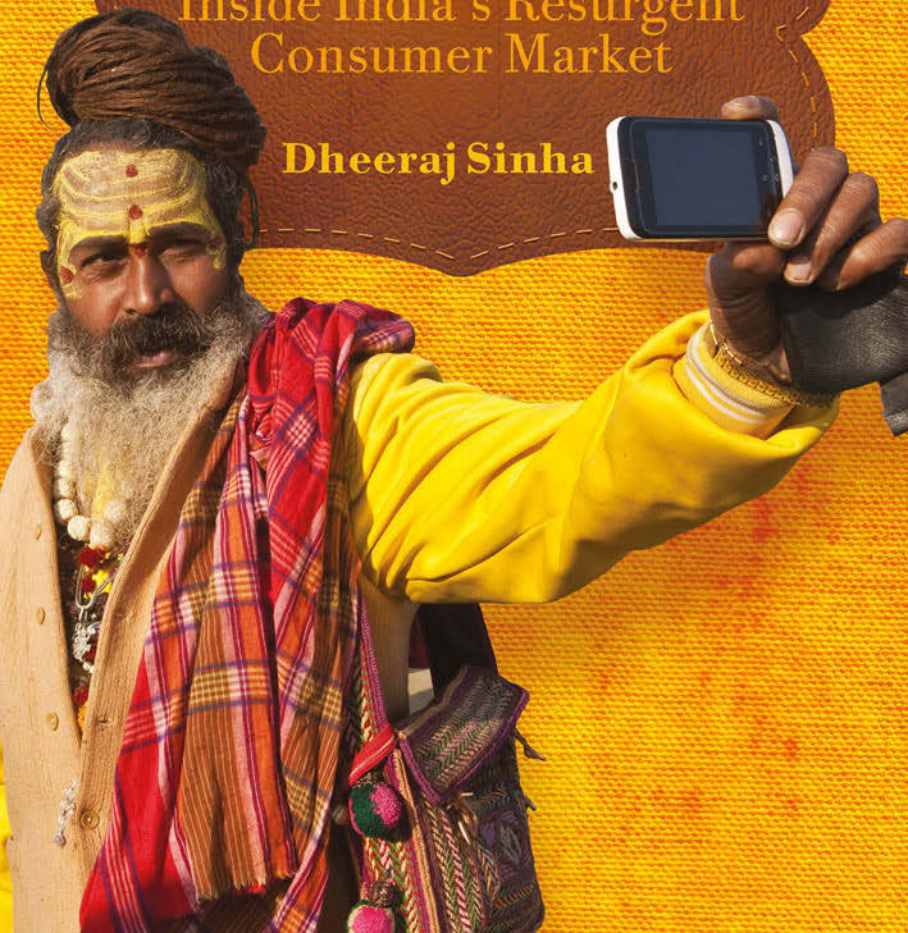


# INDIA RELOADED

Inside India's Resurgent  
Consumer Market

Dheeraj Sinha



India's diversity often conceals its underlying unity. Dheeraj unpeels the layers to reveal more unifying truths about India's consumers than its diversity suggests. Truths that can make the difference between success and failure for marketers. This book needs to be on every brand manager's desk.

–Ranjan Kapur, Country Manager, WPP India

Segmentation discussions can get overly data based. In *India Reloaded* Dheeraj has segmented India without jargon, providing insights on attitudes and aspirations using illustrations from films and music. Read it for an understanding of consumer India.

–Rajesh Jejurikar, President and Chief Executive, Farm Equipment and Two Wheelers, Mahindra & Mahindra

What can popular culture teach us about business? Everything. Dheeraj makes connections between the seemingly disparate socio-cultural and political behaviors of India to explain its consumption culture. This is a must-have for successful businesses – the cultural compass of new India.

–Nirvik Singh, Chairman and CEO, Asia Pacific, Grey Group

A fascinating journey into the soul of India. Sinha's original analysis of India's consumer society will inspire innovative thinking in the boardrooms and classrooms that are preparing future executives. A compelling and engaging read that uncovers the new reality of a fast-changing nation.

–Glyn Atwal, Burgundy School of Business, France

India's consumption landscape is complex and challenging. One half of consumers are still enjoying the democratization of access that many brands brought in 20 years ago, while another half is dealing with the after effects of it. Western management thinking often attempts to break up the challenge into parts, into neat compartments to be addressed independently. This makes India look an even more difficult market than it is. This book boldly attempts to bring it all together, to see it through an Indian lens, to see the one-ness in it. Practicing marketing managers will find this refreshing and, I suspect, rather useful.

–Dev Amritesh, President and Chief Operating Officer,  
Dunkin' Donuts India

Dheeraj brings alive a new India, one that wants to live every moment as a spectacle. Contrary to the assumptions, India's mass consumers want the latest in technology and life, and are eager to upgrade to new experiences. To woo this India, brands need to have a swagger themselves. *India Reloaded* cuts through the clichés around emerging markets – it's a refreshing take.

–Frederique Covington-Corbett, Director,  
International Marketing, Twitter

## About the author

Dheeraj leads the strategic planning function for Grey (WPP Group) in India and South and Southeast Asia. Previously, he led planning for Bates (WPP Group) in Asia, across 13 countries. He has worked in advertising for more than 16 years across McCann Erickson, Euro RSCG, Bates, and now Grey.

Dheeraj is the author of the highly acclaimed *Consumer India – Inside the Indian Mind and Wallet*, published globally by John Wiley & Sons, Singapore. He has also authored a chapter in the second edition of *Shopper Marketing*, published by Kogan Page, US, and another chapter in *The Luxury Market in India: Maharajas to Masses*, published by Palgrave Macmillan. His paper “The Changing Mindset of a Billion Minds” is referenced in *Frommer’s Guide to India*.

Dheeraj has worked on brands and businesses across markets and categories including Sensodyne, Maxis, Maybank, Reliance Mobile, Colgate, MasterCard, LG, DBS Bank, Tata AIA, TVS, Virgin Mobile, Max Bupa, Fiat, Reckitt Benckiser, Emirates, Dabur, Park Avenue, Ashok Leyland, Marico, and CavinKare.

Dheeraj is a three-time winner of the prestigious Atticus Award (WPP’s award for best published thinking). He has won several effectiveness awards, including the Jay Chiat Planning Award by the 4A’s, the Asian Marketing Effectiveness Award, and the Yahoo Big Idea Chair. He has been a winner at APAC EFFIES and has won at EFFIES in India, five years in a row. Dheeraj was among the top 40 advertising and marketing professionals in Asia Pacific in CampaignAsia’s top 40 under 40 list for 2014.

Dheeraj was invited to speak at the Harvard India Conference 2012 at the Harvard Business School, Boston. His book is a recommended read at the Wharton School’s course on marketing in emerging economies. Dheeraj has spoken at the Esomar Asia Pacific Conferences three years in a row and has been on their program committee. He has been on the jury for the Asian Marketing Effectiveness Awards, APAC Effies, and the Global Youth Marketing Forum. He has also been a speaker at the Asian Marketing Effectiveness Festival, the CII Marketing Conference, and the Global Youth Marketing Forum, amongst many other forums.

Dheeraj has featured in various media in India and across Asia including CNBC Asia, *China Daily*, Bloomberg UTV, *Financial Times*, *Economic Times*, *Hindustan Times*, and *Business Standard*.

# **India Reloaded**

## **Inside India's Resurgent Consumer Market**

Dheeraj Sinha

palgrave  
macmillan



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Foreword © Suresh Nair 2015

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*To Valerie, Dhruva, and Daksh*

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# Foreword

I left India many moons ago. But every time I am back in India, either for work or personal reasons, I am amazed at how much has changed, and indeed how much hasn't. India's growth and momentum have made their presence felt in global geopolitics and boardrooms. When *Time* magazine turns to President Obama to write the introduction for Prime Minister Modi as a *Time* 100 global leader (April 2015), we know we are not in Kansas anymore! Indeed, India is very much present in the global marketing ambitions of most corporations. But India isn't an easy cup of tea.

There's a lot that has been spoken about India – its scale, momentum, and talent. However, there have also been murmurs whether India will ever deliver its promise. With a new government in place, and the economic indicators looking up once again, it does seem that if there was a time for India, it *is* now. Winning, however, in this new resurgent India may not be easy. We need a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the Indian consumer. Working with first level assumptions – a billion people, largely young and turning Western in their attitudes – will not be enough any longer.

Dheeraj's book, *India Reloaded*, sits squarely in the context of this new India. And true to its title, the book questions many legacy assumptions about Indian consumers and their behavior. These are serious debates and anyone setting out to build a successful business in India must have them. Dheeraj is sharp in his interrogation and gently leads you to the answers, which often appear self-evident. The many years Dheeraj has spent conducting consumer research and social experiments, observing

the changes in the cultural and the business environment, and advising clients, come to life in *India Reloaded*.

The theories built into this book have long-term implications for brands and businesses. How is mass-market thinking a trap in a context where people are rapidly upgrading to the next level of products and services? How have we locked ourselves into the conversations about India's diversity, ignoring the potential of a rich national culture, informed by its regional differences? Is Maslow's hierarchy of needs questionable in a market where all that the poor have is respect and spirituality? How must challenger brands redefine their "challenger" values for India? Why is India's growth story more credible than, say, that of China? The answers to these questions lie in what's going on in our society and culture. And that's where this book takes us.

In this book, observations from Bollywood, politics, economy, and business seamlessly coalesce to yield insights into one of the fastest growing economies of the world. In other words, life itself is a data source to shed light on what works, or more importantly, what doesn't in modern India.

The most interesting aspect of *India Reloaded* for me is the fact that it treats brand India as a hyper-brand – one that cannot be pigeonholed into a classic "white-space," but demands to be defined by its dynamic trajectory. Where is India's trajectory taking its people? *India Reloaded* points to the answer to this difficult but necessary question. This book is for those who want to build a business for tomorrow, perhaps not for those who want to keep it as business-as-usual.

Suresh Nair  
Global Chief Strategy Officer, Grey

# Acknowledgments

You write your first book because you want to. You write your second book because others want you to. A big shout out to everyone who read my first book, *Consumer India – Inside the Indian Mind and Wallet* and reached out in some way or the other. *India Reloaded* wouldn't have happened without the comments, feedback, encouragements, and brickbats that I received for my first book. An author is incomplete without the reader, so thank you everyone who picked up *Consumer India*.

*India Reloaded* is a point-of-view on how the changing culture is shaping consumption in India. Any opinion such as this is a function of several interactions with colleagues, clients, and friends over a period of time. I thank all my colleagues and clients who have helped shape my worldview. Special thanks to all the planners who I have worked with directly as a part of my team – Abhishek Chaturvedi, Soumitra Patnekar, Sonya Misquita, Ajay Ravindran, Ankit Singh, Abhijit Das, Archana Ashokkumar, Basheera Indorewala, Sajju Ambat, Khushnuma Daruwala, Jasmeeta Agarwal, Jayati Mazumdar, Devang Raiyani, and Sumant Bhattacharya.

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My respect to my parents for the life and grounding that they gave me – keeping me close to my roots. To my parents-in-law for their constant support. Valerie, my wife who put up with my long stints of travel during the week and my writing schedule during the weekend. She is also the first reviewer of the book and all other elements around it. Dhruva, our 10-year-old son, who kept a hawk’s eye on my progress, counting the number of chapters I finished in every sitting. He obviously thought I could be faster. And Daksh, our eight-month-old son who was delivered at almost the same time that I delivered the manuscript of *India Reloaded*. I owe this to all of you.

# Introduction

Every book, presentation, or conference on India starts with the potential of a 1.2 billion population. However, little has been said about what these 1.2 billion people really want and what they can afford. Consultants projected the size of the Indian middle class at 300 million and businesses made a beeline for this mass-market consumer in India. Most of these companies, heavily invested in the potential of India's mass consumer, are still waiting to get profitable. While we may project the size of middle class as 300 million, only 56 million people own four-wheelers in India, according to the Census 2011. Was this a case of over-projection then? Are we living with other such myths about the Indian consumer market?

India is celebrated for its mobile phone penetration; we now have over 900 million mobile phone connections. On the other hand, 600 million people in India don't have access to toilets and clean drinking water. This is the market where the poorest consumers rejected the cheapest car Nano, while luxury brands such as Audi continue to post double-digit growth rates. How should brands and businesses make sense of such stark realities? It appears that there is more to India and its consumer markets than has been discussed and debated thus far. The India on paper looks very different from the India in reality. What lies beyond the big-young-growing stereotype of India?

During the last two decades of the free-market regime in India, businesses have followed certain assumptions about the Indian consumer market. Yet they have met with mixed results. India was seen as a huge market, delivering what was popularly termed as the "demographic dividend." While