



Will The real SELF-RELIANT INDIA show itself?

I was asked to comment on the Hon. PM's message about being "Vocal about Local" by a media outlet and the Question was **How can PR help brands be vocal about local?** My question to the journalist was "Is Lifebuoy soap not local?" Coming from Hindustan Unilever would we consider Lifebuoy to be *videshi*? It would be important to point out that in the same speech the PM also mentioned that a self-reliant India would NOT be isolationist or protectionist.

How would one define a *swadeshi* company? As I see it, any company governed under Indian Laws, creating jobs for Indian's, serving Indian consumers and paying taxes in India should be a *swadeshi* company; a company that works in the interest of the people of India. This call for *swadeshi* cannot be equated with the Quit India movement against the British. That was against a tyrannical rule that systematically crippled our local industry and aggressively dumped imported goods here. The call for *swadeshi* by the PM has to be interpreted with the filters given above otherwise we risk being pushed back into 60s, where we had no option but to buy sub-standard, over-priced products with little or no service support. Competition forced Indian companies to get in shape, perform or perish. The same holds true for any company operating in the 'world's largest free market democracy' that we call home.

Am I making a case for *videshi* companies, certainly not. What I am saying is simple, we need to change the lens with which we need to see the call of the PM for a self-reliant India and understand that the country of origin does not make a company *swadeshi* or *videshi*. Its conduct does. Would we consider Hindustan Unilever any less Indian? It employs around 18,000 people here and sells over 35 brands. Would Horlicks be any less Indian or loved less because it comes from Glaxo Smith Kline? How would life be without "taller, stronger, sharper"? Would Maggie be considered foreign because it comes from Nestle? It has at least 8 factories across the country and has been associated with India for over a century. Dulux paint, which has been here since 1928, as ICI or now AkzoNobel? Is MS Office not an integral part of our operating system? Is STAR TV, with all the soaps and sports, not an indispensable part of Indian homes? Is Suzuki Motors (Maruti-Suzuki) not a part of our nation's history? These brands have enriched our lives, provided employment, and given us prosperity.

A self-reliant India cannot afford to be isolationist in any manner or shun products because of a company's country or origin. What a self-reliant India needs is a framework of a level playing field for companies to operate in, a transparent and a predictable policy regime that attracts investors, irrespective of their country of origin. It needs the collective effort of 'Team India' to encourage companies to "Be in India, For India" and "From India to the World". We have an opportunity to become an integral part of the 'new global distributed supply chain'. I believe this is the real meaning of a self-reliant India by Hon. PM Sh. Narendra Modi.

Shining examples of collaboration in the auto sector like Maruti-Suzuki, Hero-Honda, TVS Suzuki, Mahindra-Ford have led to the development of local capabilities and local markets and secured global supply chain. The reality of 'Make-in-India' would only be realised when we create a shared value environment built on principals of equity and fair play that create win-win for all. If we are to realise the ambition of a USD 5trillion economy, we need to attract capital irrespective of the flag on the currency, instead see to it that it is invested for good of the people of our country.

It is well understood that Capital is attracted to Returns and it would serve our country's policy makers best to focus businesses on making fair and adequate returns by offering products that subscribe to a shared set of standards, governed by rules and regulations equally applicable to all and allow for 'minimum government and maximum governance'. Thankfully, today access to capital is not a constraint and if policy is predictable, stable and driven by a development roadmap, industry will not need sops or incentives. Bold reforms that unshackle the energy of young India are the need of the hour if we are to benefit from our demographic dividend. We need to make FOUR words the mantra of 'Make in India' **Scale, Quality, Value and Sustainability**, if we are to out-compete the factory of the world in the race for our place in the Post COVID world order. We need to make 'Made-In-India' a global standard of reliability. Yes, we need to be vocal about local but be clear about what is local.

To communicators and brand owners, *swadeshi* or *videshi* will no longer inspire consumers as they are more discerning than ever and demand nothing but the best-value-for their-rupee; they will choose you not because of the flag on your brand, but because of the quality and value you provide to them. They will judge you by your conduct not by your words.

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About Ashwani

Ashwani Singla is the Founding Managing Partner of Astrum (astrum.in), India's first specialist reputation management advisory that uses science to understand and shape public opinion ethically. In his two decades of experience in industry, he has donned the role of a trusted advisor and strategist for both the C-Suite & Political leaders. He has advised both Indian and multinational corporations across a range of sectors. He has been the *election campaign strategist* and pollster for leading national and regional political parties and has been involved in several successful national and state election campaigns for close to a decade, including the defining 2014 campaign of the BJP.

Prior to founding Astrum, Ashwani was the CEO & Co-Promoter of Genesis Burson-Marsteller and Asia MD of Penn Schoen Berland. He is also the Founder Executive Director of Impact Research & Measurement.



About Constellar

Constellar, the Astrum (www.astrum.in) blog is the new avatar of Ashwani's personal blog/Reputare.

While continuing to explore and prompt a dialogue on the subject of reputation in all spheres, Constellar has an expanded scope to guest contributors and thought leaders. As the headline suggests, we will endeavor to bring insights and new thinking in the development of professional reputation management in India.

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