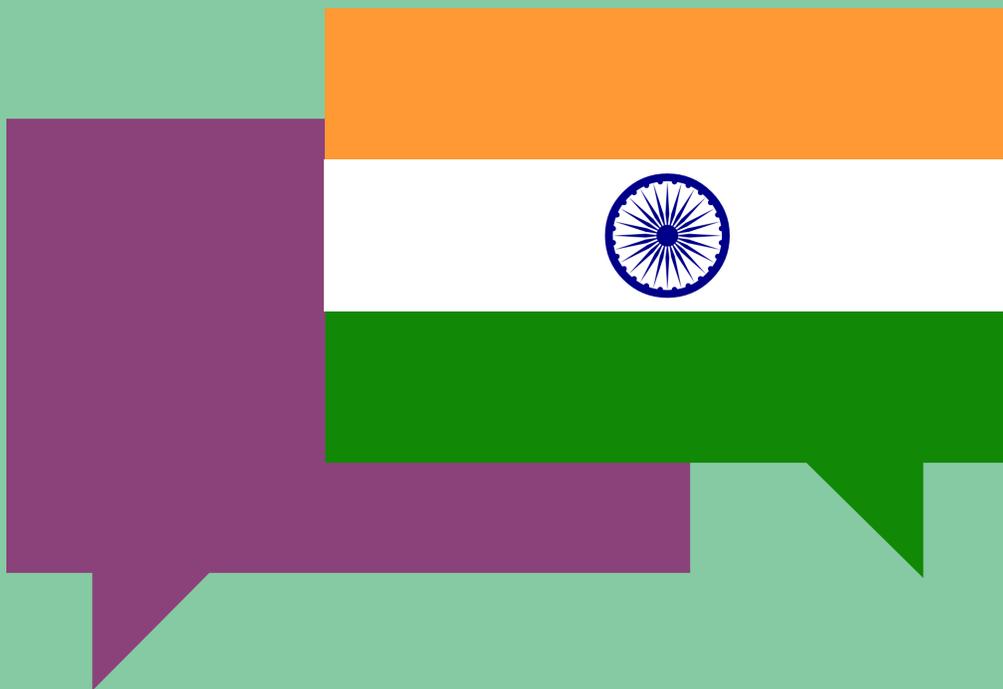


The Guide to Indian Social Media

*Strategies for breaking into the fastest-growing
online market in the world*



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Introduction

If we told you that a country with only 11 percent Internet penetration held the title for third largest Internet population in the world, you'd probably laugh at us.

Then we'd laugh right back and tell you it's true.

Though it seems statistically impossible, [ComScore](#) reports that India — with its 17.6 million new users since March 2012 (a 31 percent year-over-year increase!) — is third in Internet populace, right behind China and the USA.

Wait, what?! How is that possible?

For starters, the US Census Bureau reports that India has over *1.2 billion* people living within its boundaries, and that 56 percent of India's population is under the age of 30. Mix high numbers of young people with an urban environment and easy access to Internet, and watch the user numbers flood in.

But it's not just the high number of urban youths jumping online. In fact, according to data from the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), 60 million of India's 190 total million Internet users come from rural areas. Unlike their urban netizens, however, rural netizens rarely access the Internet from their home PCs. Instead, they're heading in droves to Internet cafes (58 percent) and increasingly, to their mobile phones (12 percent).

In addition, the IMAI reports that these two types of users are also opening their browsers for different reasons. Where urban netizens use the web overwhelmingly to communicate (87 percent) and use social media (67 percent), those in rural areas like to be "entertained" via things like YouTube to the astounding tune of 75 percent. Only 56 percent of rural users are jumping online to communicate — more than a 30 percent decrease from their urban cohorts.

So how do you — the savvy e-commerce superstar — appeal to both types of Internet users and penetrate a massive market for online shopping? The answer shouldn't simply be to focus on urban users and neglect the rural ones because there are less of them. After all, with Internet penetration numbers exploding around the country, rural users may one day surpass urban ones. If you've only targeted one subset of this unique equation, you could be setting yourself up for a big failure down the road.

We're getting ahead of ourselves a bit, though. Before we can talk about how to target different Indian Internet users, we should take a look at the main players and platforms that are both available and booming in India.

Unlike China where certain social media networks *::cough, Facebook, cough::* are banned and other e-commerce opportunities limited, India's firewalls are wide open and growing by astounding numbers.

In terms of social media, Comscore says 86 percent of Indian Internet users admit to spending time on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. And just like in the US, Facebook reigns supreme: around 60 million users visited Facebook on their PCs, spending an average of 217 minutes – or more than 3.5 hours — on the site.

As of August 2013, there was a 28 percent increase in Facebook visitors from the previous 12 months. Woah! That's a lot of people looking at baby pictures, and there are plenty of them to look at considering a baby is born every 2 seconds in India.

But that's pretty much where similarities in rank end. While Facebook is the number one social media network in India, the second is, surprisingly, the business-focused networking site LinkedIn. Over 11 million unique visitors flocked to the site by mid-2013, spending 19 minutes on average surfing their connections. That's a 58 percent year-on-year growth from 2012.

Even more surprisingly, previously strong networks in India — like Twitter and Orkut, for example — saw big falls in 2013. The popular microblogging site dropped 15 percent on its year-on-year analysis with only 3.8 million unique visitors. Filling the void were newcomers like Tumblr and Pinterest, both of which saw gains of 130 percent and 589 percent, respectively, in their year-on-year rates.

And what about e-commerce? While Comscore reports that 60 percent of netizens shop online, they also say this sector is underdeveloped compared to worldwide peers, leaving significant room for penetration and engagement. By how much is India lacking? To put it in perspective, China's average time spent on retail sites is approximately 169 minutes. The US? 84. And India? A measly 28 minutes.

Ok, so if users are spending less time on e-commerce sites, including MYNTRA.com, FLIPKART.com and Amazon sites, where are they spending their time? Turns out they're watching video. Over 31.5 million viewers watched videos on YouTube, with a 27 percent increase in Indian online video audiences over a year, according to Comscore. Additionally, over 54 million watched an online video on their PCs. In fact, of the top ten visited sites in the country, seven of them were video sites including DailyMotion, Vevo, Metacafe, and Vimeo. Interestingly, of the top ten sites only one is a local distributor: *The Times of India*, a news source.

Ready to find out how to best market to the Indian masses, how the population has historically paid attention to what marketers have to say, and how you can get them buying your products or services consistently? Keep reading.

facebook®

Facebook

main uses *Photo sharing, news feed updates, chatting*

Launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook quickly took off as the number one social media network in the USA. These days, Facebook is Facebook no matter where the user is signing in, right? Not so fast. As it turns out, this media behemoth has gone through many iterations on the way to the top and has hurdled quite a few roadblocks along the way.

For example, where the vast majority of US Internet users first accessed Facebook from their desktops, new users in India are flocking to the service via mobile. Obviously, this sets up a different experience and one that Facebook has had to adapt to as it continues its upward crawl through the country.

The further challenge? Many of these mobile visitors aren't coming from smartphones like iPhones. Instead, they're visiting with basic cell phones and entry-level smartphones, so Facebook has needed to redefine their strategies to accommodate and target this new user base.

It's accomplished this to date by creating a new version for each level of access. To date, Facebook has eight different versions: one for desktops, smart phones, feature phones, an Android app, an iPhone app, a Windows app, and two others for Blackberry and 2G phones. Where many American users are accessing Facebook on \$600+ devices, Indian users — especially in rural areas — access on devices that cost \$50 or less. That huge dichotomy, and what's available tech-wise to the end users, is something that's important to keep in mind as you start your marketing planning.

How to Market on Facebook in India

In a recent study by [Ernst & Young](#) on Indian social media, over 95.7 percent of surveyed social media-savvy organizations in India use the medium to build communities and advocate usage while 76.1 percent use social media as a platform to highlight brand news.

They also state that around 16 percent of organizations use social media for both the above reasons, but also for customer service, lead generation, and research. When we're talking about social media networks in this case, EY is talking largely about Facebook, followed by Twitter and YouTube.

So what does that mean for you? In a space already crowded with Indian and international brands looking to capitalize on the growing Internet population of India, how can you stand out?

It turns out, in many of the same ways as Facebook marketers do in the US: by engaging with your communities, creating sticky, innovative campaigns, and by integrating Facebook into your already existing marketing plans versus silo-ing it (and other social media platforms) in a different conversation.

But if you're looking to make a big splash, you should remember the immense potential that e-commerce has in Indian markets. With Indians only spending 28 minutes on e-commerce sites in the country and a heck of a lot more time on Facebook, wouldn't it make sense to bring your e-commerce solution where Indians are versus asking them to come to you?

When you dive into it, there are only positives. Opening an f-commerce platform allows Indians to interact with your products and services in an environment where they're already comfortable — which could help increase your conversions and earn you a database full of loyal customers.

So what should you know before joining the e-commerce Indian game? According to a study by [ASSOCHAM](#), the reasons that so many Indians are hesitant to jump on the online buying bandwagon are problems you should already be set up to fix:

- They find delivery costs too high
- They have a fear of sharing personal financial info online
- They lack trust on whether products will be delivered in good condition

If you're already set up as an established business, these should be problems you've already encountered...and likely figured out solutions for. [With analysts predicting](#) that India may soon overtake the US as Facebook's top market, this is definitely a space to figure out, dig in your heels and make a name for yourself.

Recap

- **Tune in and discover what devices your fans are using**
- **Create sticky, innovative campaigns to drive engagement**
- **Adopt and build a robust Facebook store**
- **Earn the trust of your customers and find ways to alleviate the concerns of potential customers**



LinkedIn

main uses

Business networking, job searching, professional community building

With over 20 million members as of May 2013, India's [LinkedIn](#) base has grown over 500 percent in the three years since its launch. Boasting the largest member base outside the US, the company reports that IT services, computer software, and accounting are the top three industries on the site.

Why such a large population on the professional network? For one, 79 percent of Indian professionals believe in career luck and (maybe by networking those chances increase?) and 43 percent of women professionals in India maintain that they could never be a “stay at home mom,” which means there are more and more women looking for career opportunities, including connecting with colleagues and peers.

Even more interestingly, the site says that 80 percent of their users influence business decisions, which could mean that while the site may not have as many users as say, Facebook, the ones using LinkedIn could be far more powerful and influential.

Why's that important? The people making the decisions are also often the ones leading the charge, telling others what they should pay attention to and influencing beyond just direct purchase decisions.

How to Market on LinkedIn in India

In 2011, LinkedIn India launched LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, which provides a platform that enables companies to connect with audiences online and measure their success. This suite includes everything from audience targeting to content ads to partner messages. Since then, the opportunities on LinkedIn for e-commerce and marketing solutions in India has grown exponentially to closely mirror the strategy in the US.

So, how can you effectively reach this professional community?

For starters, build a robust company page that leaves little to the imagination when users visit. You'll want to include customers, job opportunities, and information on your products and services. Think of it this way: they've come to your page because you've peaked their interest – you don't want them to leave because they think you don't fully understand the space they're functioning in.

Second, create a LinkedIn group so users can join your community. A group also allows you the opportunity to message members once a week, which can be helpful if you have actual news to share. The thing to remember is not to spam — only message — when you have something of value to add.

What types of value can you create for your users?

LinkedIn is where the power of the influencer comes in more heavily than on Facebook, especially for business to business or sales pursuits. Because many Indians crave connections with important industry leaders, securing one of these individual's who exemplifies your brand could have a long-term beneficial outcome for your company.

Partnering with influencers on endorsement deals, getting them on board to co-write a series of blog posts relevant to the audience you're looking to gain the attention of, or creating events and/or webinars where Indian professionals can connect to mentors they admire are all great places to start.

Another thing to keep in mind when you start LinkedIn marketing solutions is that Indians are very cognizant of local conditions, so appealing to the local market will win you *big* points in the country. How can you do that? By speaking to people on the ground about their pain points, understanding how their issues are different from those elsewhere in the country and then targeting your approach accordingly instead of blanketing your efforts across multiple regions.

You can compare it to the hyper-localization we're seeing across the US. Indians sometimes want to be acknowledged for their differences, not grouped for their similarities. Pay attention to the nuances here and you'll go far.

To get the word out, you can also run sponsored ads that drive back to the discussions with your influencers or to your LinkedIn page or group. But don't get trigger-happy here. Sponsored ads should be a way to disseminate all of the other great things you're doing on the platform, not comprise your entire strategy.

Recap

- **Build out your brand page with all relevant touchpoints**
- **Create a group as a way to include and notify people of discussions**
- **Partner with an influencer**
- **Be cognizant of local market conditions**
- **Run sponsored ads back to your content**



Tumblr

main uses **Microblogging**

As we mentioned above, Tumblr has seen explosive growth in India, with a 130 percent year-over-year boom. So, why the sudden surge?

When we start to look at the reasons Tumblr may be thriving in India, we can look to the US for clues. In the US, many are calling Tumblr the “anti-blog” for the simple fact that people don’t use the service merely to find an audience that they can deliver content to. In fact, many people appreciate and thrive on the anonymity of Tumblr. To put it another way: they simply don’t want to build an audience of people who know who they are.

Perhaps that’s the reason that the demographics on Tumblr skew younger.

Here's why that could be

Younger children — many of whom may not be permitted access to Facebook or the Internet — can remain “unseen.” In kid speak, that means if parents don't know they're doing it, they can't get in trouble for it. Secondly, teens have shorter attention spans, and Tumblr's quick-hit publishing platform strikes the perfect balance for them. For these youths, images and videos win out over long written diatribes.

Another thing to keep in mind is that many of India's netizens are heading to the service via their mobile device. Think about it this way: where we just learned that Facebook requires eight different iterations of its service to stay relevant, all while eating up data and taking longer to process, Tumblr is an easily accessible solution for mobile. In essence, it was practically made to be free of clutter, so publishers can post from virtually anywhere, at any time.

When we think about it like that, maybe Tumblr's not just anti-blog, but the platform that may overtake soon-to-be antiquated social platforms like Facebook.

How to Market on Tumblr

Here's the thing about Tumblr that might be difficult to hear: even though it's one of the fastest-growing, most revered sites in India right now...your brand may not be the right fit for the platform. Now obviously it's hard to say without analyzing your business goals and objectives, or even knowing what type of business you're in, but here's why: Tumblr is highly visual, meaning you'll need a dedicated person or team pumping out quality content to succeed. For some smaller companies — and many larger ones — dedicating a person to this endeavor with little measureable ROI is just not in the budget.

If that's the case, we'd recommend you hold on implementing these strategies until you can do them correctly, versus putting your name out and failing to provide quality content. That's not to say you shouldn't monitor changes on Tumblr and keep your finger on the pulse, we'd just caution you to proceed slowly.

In other words, you don't want to be the mom dressing like the teenager and hoping to be cool. You need to be the teenager. If you're still reading we'll assume you're in a position to jump right in. Now what?

The first thing to keep in mind is that you'll lose the blogging functionality you'd find in a platform like Wordpress. That's okay. You know why? Because that's the beauty of Tumblr — your Indian users aren't expecting 500 word essays from you. What they are expecting, however, are short snippets of information they care about that may drive back to another blog with more information.

Yikes. Sounds like a lot of work, right? Two blogs? Two different platforms?

Here's a pro tip: Tumblr should be an extension of your activities. Kind of like a net that goes out and catches users to pull them in closer to your boat. What should Tumblr NOT be? Your entire strategy, or the boat that's holding all the fish.

The most popular posts on Tumblr include anything that might come out of Photoshop: a great picture, an animated GIF, or an infographic, according to Tumblr HQ. That means to get the most out of your Tumblr page, you need to make your brand visual.

Hm, that's great for a fashion company who has product at the ready and can photograph people on the streets for a style watch. But what about a business that primarily works with intangible goods or services or some that aren't quite as photogenic?

What's the best way to extend your reach on Tumblr in that type of situation? Get creative. Stepping outside of your box — and maybe even a touch away from your core objectives and goals — could be just what you need to succeed on Tumblr.

Recap

- **Step out of the box of your direct business objectives**
- **Use Tumblr as a net to drive awareness of your brand**
- **Make it visual, punchy and cool**



Pinterest

main uses

*Image sharing (products, events, hobbies, etc.),
pin-boarding*

Development of Pinterest began in late-2009, and the company officially launched the site in private beta in 2010. However, while the site now boasts over 70 million users worldwide, many marketers find themselves perplexed at how the site actually functions, and the benefits of jumping onto the bandwagon.

By creating a board on Pinterest, users can upload, save, sort, and manage images (called pins). When another person comes across a pin he or she likes on a pinboard, he or she can re-pin it to their own board where it's shared with his or her followers. Commenting, browsing, and liking are also features available to users.

It's important to note that the key demographic on Pinterest is overwhelmingly women. In fact, as of 2012, it was reported that 83 percent of global users are women. The only country where Pinterest skewed toward a male demographic was in Britain, where 56 percent of users were males.

How to Market on Pinterest

Similar to Tumblr, Pinterest runs on visuals. But unlike Tumblr, there are some unique advantages to mastering the Pinterest game. Incredibly, [Pinterest drives more referral traffic](#) than Google+, LinkedIn, and YouTube combined. So, what does that tell us?

Give your users something to refer to.

We're simplifying a bit, and there are certainly other factors that drive referrals, but it really all comes down to great content across all platforms. When you start examining your content for clues on how to make it better for Pinterest, you should start by optimizing all of your content around the web: on your website, on Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, and even Pinterest itself. By making sure the metadata on your images plays nice with Pinterest, you'll see a greater return when another users "pins" your picture on his or her board.

Speaking of boards, let's talk about your brand's. To optimize, you'll want to size your pictures correctly and include both links and prices on your pins. Why?

For one, links are how people will get back to your content to purchase, so this is arguably the most important piece of the equation (duh, the referral part!) In terms of pricing, pins with prices get 36 percent more likes than those without. While it may seem counter-productive because you think you might alienate people who can't afford your price point, users actually appreciate knowing upfront what your product or service will cost. And if they're not able to pay for it now, it could go onto their aspirational board for when they're ready to make a larger purchase.

Second, engagement is key. As with all social platforms, users wants to feel like you're paying attention. Along with feeling valued, you're giving them the opportunity to brag to their friends that your ultra-cool brand gave them some love. Happy pinning!

Recap

- **Optimize your content for Pinterest across all brand touchpoints**
- **Trial-and-error approach on what images and products work best**
- **Engage with your users by re-pinning their content, commenting and liking**



YouTube

main uses

Watching and uploading video

YouTube leads the charge in share with 55 percent of the online video market in India, according to our ComScore data. But let's take a moment and backtrack on why YouTube is so popular across India.

There's a case to be made that YouTube trumps other distributors because local content is distributed mainly through the platform that's dominated by Bollywood, India's movie production hub. As anyone familiar with the popularity and influence of Bollywood knows, it's no surprise that its number one distribution platform would be widely popular with Indian citizens.

Additionally, video as a whole is increasing in India. In the past year alone, online video audiences grew 27 percent!

How much video are Indian netizens watching? Based on a [study conducted by Google](#), YouTube viewers in India now watch an average of 48 hours of video each month on the site. That means that if YouTube were a TV channel, it would be one of the top 10 in country.

How to Market on YouTube

With so many companies marketing across the globe on YouTube, you may think it's easy to get up and running, then quickly amass a loyal group of followers. It doesn't quite work like that.

For starters, Indian netizens aren't coming to YouTube to watch a commercial or see a tutorial — they're coming to be entertained. That means taking a look at how you can create new, compelling content that fits into their allotted Internet time. Remember above when we mentioned that Indian netizens in rural areas are accessing the Internet from cafés? Café Internet equals limited time and limited resources, as cafés generally cost money for users. The question, then, is how to capture Indian attention during a limited time frame.

We can't answer this question specifically for your business, but you should take some time to seriously consider how your brand can have the biggest impact in this context. Do you create a mini-YouTube series that aims to shoot 2 or 3-minute segments for users on a time crunch? Perhaps. Do you partner with an A-list Indian singer for exclusive releases and music videos? Maybe. The key here is to think outside the box, think outside of your business objectives and go to the heart of why Indians love watching videos.

Putting the time in upfront could end up paying you dividends down the line.

No matter what you choose to roll out, you'll see the most success if you give your Indian customers something to come back to time and time again, with a high level of consistency.

Consider for a moment if they have limited time — they're not going to be happy to spend it navigating to your page only to discover stale content. Instead, constantly stay on track with a production schedule so you're turning out new content all the time. Preferably, you'd deliver this content on the same day so your audience knows when to expect it from you.

Recap

- **Keep in mind that the Indian user is looking for entertainment**
- **Create content on a production schedule**



Orkut

main uses

Video sharing, chatting, liking

Owned and operated by Google, Orkut was India's largest social network until 2012, when Facebook overtook it for king of Indian social media. Since then, Orkut's numbers have dropped from around 6.5 million to 2 million unique viewers from 2012 to 2013. That's a 68 percent loss year-on-year, and projections suggest that number is only slated to fall deeper into the red.

So why has Orkut fallen from India's good graces after almost nine years in the spotlight?

It's hard to pinpoint the reasoning on one specific factor, but some Indian users point to fake profile controversies running rampant on Orkut. These fake profiles not only altered the experience for Indians, they also allowed for unabashed harassment across the network. Where Facebook actively seeks out and tries to extinguish fake profiles, Orkut has had issues addressing and ridding the site of fakes.

Additionally, youths across India say Orkut is an outdated network that's used mainly by parents and relatives. Eerily, their comments mimic what many teens and young adults in the US are beginning to say about Facebook.

How to Market on Orkut

Oh, Orkut. While this former giant was a valiant contender for many years, it now looks like Orkut may soon be going the way of MySpace here in the states. So, why are we including it on our list?

For one, it was one of India's first large social media presences and helped pave the way for the Facebook invasion. There are still a high number of active users on the site that form a different user base from the ones signing up for Facebook in droves. Remember: younger users view Orkut as a network for good 'ol mom and pop...meaning mom and pop are still active on the service. However, here's our advice: unless your future plans include a targeted push to parents of teens and young adults, we wouldn't recommend spending too much time with Orkut.

If you're really interested in testing the waters, we recommend creating a detailed page and perhaps running a few promotions to gauge user feedback and interest. But a full-blown marketing campaign the likes of a Facebook one? You may want to think of the options listed here. Our marketing dollars and resources would be better spent with the other big guy in the room.

Recap

- **Consider your audience and where they are**
- **Run a few ads to test the climate of the platform**



Twitter

main uses

News feed updates, picture sharing

When Twitter hit India's airwaves, the service saw an impressive increase in popularity throughout 2012. In 2013, however, the site dropped 15 percent year-on-year with only 3.8 million unique visitors. Why the decline?

Again, it's hard to pinpoint one reason on the deterioration, but netizens in Asian countries like Japan and India claim Twitter is too open and too crowded. In essence, the reason Twitter may be failing is the exact reason that Tumblr is succeeding — Indian teens crave a more exclusive social network experience that Twitter isn't capable of providing.

In an [AP article](#) on the rapidly declining rates in India, Karthik Srinivasan, head of social media at the Bangalore-based Ogilvy & Mather, offers up a different position: "Indian people are still warming up to Twitter," he says. He adds that the concept of interacting with strangers instead of friends takes some getting used to in a society that remains family-oriented.

The question to ask, then, is with rates already dropping, have Indians chosen to skip over Twitter and move straight to platforms that make more sense for their lifestyle and customs?

Regardless of whether Twitter catches on in any great way in India, there's still something to be said for the current celebrities and politicians that have taken to the microblogging service. [Bollywood stars and musical acts](#) quickly amassed large numbers of followers on Twitter, so perhaps there's something there in the way of influencers here, even if there's not necessarily a widespread use of the service throughout the entire country.

How to Market on Twitter

The great thing about Twitter is that content on the site spreads quickly and virally, so a tweet you send out at 9 AM could be seen by half of the user base at the end of the day. Twitter's also easy to manage, if not incredibly time consuming. For many Indian netizens, Twitter hasn't crossed the threshold quite yet – and it may never cross over – but we still don't think that's a reason to ignore the Indian audience that is there.

In fact, while Twitter may not be pulling rural citizens to their phones to tap out tweets, many young, successful Indians flock to Twitter to stay in touch with the rest of the world. For example, look to the success Twitter has had with Bollywood stars and A-list actresses to see what we mean.

Additionally, Twitter makes it easy to integrate content and extend your marketing power by allowing the inclusion of video, links, and images. Basically anything that's compelling content is apt to be shared on Twitter, making your job as the marketer even easier. The challenge lies in finding interesting content to share. Are you starting to see a serious trend in this whole social media game?

Indians want creative content that's entertaining that they can easily share. Oh yeah, and they want to know you're listening to them and their specific needs.

So, as a brand, you should be giving them that. Create campaigns targeted at the local level and then tune in to the conversation. Create a weekly chat on issues that major Twitter users are having in the country; broadcast your brand while simultaneously creating value in the community.

And how can you extend your reach even further?

By getting the ear — or in this case, the fingers — of one of those top Indian influencers. Maybe you don't need to nail down a Bollywood star with 15 million followers (though that certainly wouldn't hurt), but focus on your core business and find an influencer that makes sense. Just like in the US and China, Indians are more likely to pay attention to someone they recognize, admire, and trust than from an unknown brand.

Recap

- **Stay engaged and initiate discussion**
- **Create content that's easily sharable and interesting**
- **Partner with an influencer in the community or on Twitter to gain further traction**

Conclusion

To wrap this up, we'll bring it back to one key word that should drive all of your marketing objectives in India, in social media and in the context of your brand: authenticity.

It's not something we've talked about much in the context of this book, but it's just as important in India as everywhere else. Go into each of these platforms with your true colors and focus on creating real value and utility for your Indian customers, even if you sometimes need to lean on a trial-and-error approach.

Indian netizens aren't expecting you to be perfect, they're just expecting you to try. And when you do – providing there's a layer of honesty and transparency present - you can expect to be rewarded with an attentive and loyal customer base throughout India.

Have questions about these principles and tips or want to share your experience with applying them?

Connect with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or [LinkedIn](#).

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