



Brand Strategy and Ideas for Oberoi Hotels

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In a blog post and SlideShare presentation on Indian brands going global, I had written that our luxury hotel chains are some of the finest in the world and have the potential to create recognition for brand India.

Oberoi Hotels is one of these fine luxury hotels that is well-known and highly regarded across the world. And although the brand doesn't advertise much, it always features among the finest hotels in international travel magazines' readers' choice awards.

In this document, I attempt to set a brand strategy as well as share my thoughts and ideas on brand communication for Oberoi Hotels.

Background

- Oberoi Hotels is India's finest chain of luxury hotels that has several hotel properties in India and overseas
- Its hotels are located in cities that are business destinations as well as those that are tourism attractions and resort towns
- Their chain of hotels span what can be called the Orient, from Morocco and Egypt in North Africa to the Gulf countries, India and Bali in Indonesia.
- From what I know of their business, having interacted with their chief during our meetings from Ogilvy Delhi on American Express, the Oberoi's biggest source of business is the business traveller from corporations and international organisations
- That they are a favourite with corporate travellers is not an accident, but part of a carefully devised plan to cater to them
- The Oberoi differentiates itself from the others through its quiet, unobtrusive service and elegant luxury, which make its hotels great places to work and conduct business in
- However, since competition for Oberoi Hotels comes not only from the other Indian luxury hotel brands such as Taj and ITC, but from many international luxury hotel brands that are in India and also operate internationally, it is time the Oberoi considered a clear, differentiated brand strategy to protect and grow its brand

Target Audience

- The target audience for Oberoi Hotels would comprise senior and top management of companies, mostly multinational corporations, international organisations, as well as senior staff from the diplomatic community

- These are people who travel frequently on business and stay at the Oberoi on expense account
- They would be people who appreciate the finer things in life, are discerning consumers and also respect and value their privacy and quiet space
- They would be people who have a lot on their minds and would therefore appreciate an environment that they can quietly luxuriate in, think, plan and conduct business
- The target audience would also comprise the luxury leisure traveller, who is likely to be the same person described above, similar, and is travelling on vacation.

Competition

- In India, competition for Oberoi Hotels would be Taj Hotels and ITC Hotels, followed by international hotel brands such as Hyatt, Marriott and Four Seasons
- Internationally, the biggest competitors would be Four Seasons, Marriott and Starwood Hotels, though in East Asia, The Mandarin and The Peninsula would also be considered, even if Oberoi Hotels are not present in Hong Kong, but in Bali, Indonesia
- In brand image terms, the last two are important competitors.

Advantages and strengths of Oberoi Hotels

I think there are three areas of strength that Oberoi Hotels have and which they can capitalize on to build and grow their brand.

1. World-class luxury and service

The Oberoi chain of hotels is reported to have one of the oldest and most prestigious hotel management programmes for its personnel in India, one that is highly regarded in the industry. It sets a world-class standard for luxury hotel management that is developed in India which, along with fluency in English and international languages, sets the Oberoi hotel managerial staff apart from the rest.

2. Luxury that extends beyond the hotel room

Luxury at an Oberoi Hotel begins from the time you step into the lobby, or perhaps from the time you make your reservations. The hotels are designed for quiet, efficient service and to that extent, they make perfect accommodation for doing business. From quiet discussions and meetings in the lobby, to business lunches and dinners, tea on the lawns, and of course, business centres and meeting rooms to help with larger meetings, the Oberoi is the perfect setting for work.

3. Culinary excellence

That Oberoi Hotels feature some of the best fine dining specialty restaurants and bars is well-known in India. It must be true of their international hotel properties as well, as they cater to a discerning, international palate.

There is yet another dimension to Oberoi Hotels, that I think can help build the brand in a distinctive way. It has to do with its locations as well as the design and ambience of its hotel properties. Oberoi Hotels are in business as well as in leisure destinations, but wherever they might be, there seems to be attempt to provide an environment close to nature.

It is in some ways, linked to point 2 above, of extending the sense of luxury beyond the hotel room. Even in a large city such as Delhi, Oberoi has one hotel overlooking Delhi Golf Club, and another, Oberoi Maidens, in the old Civil Lines part of the city, that is a quiet, secluded, wooded suburb. Having enjoyed afternoon tea at Oberoi Maidens, way back when I was at Delhi University over 40 years ago and my father would take me there on his visits to Delhi, I can vouch for its quiet, luxurious ambience and exquisite tea service.

In recent years, Oberoi has been building and adding new properties, especially in north India, which seem to aim at luxury of the palace variety. These are all suffixed with a -vilas, as in Udaivilas, Amarvilas, Rajvilas, etc. With my limited knowledge of Hindi, I think the word vilas is supposed to mean a home or an abode of luxury. To western travellers, it might sound similar to villas, which is not a bad thing, actually.

From what I have seen in a few images on their website, these Oberoi Vilas hotels are designed very much in the Rajasthani palace tradition, with arches, colonnades, domed minarets, and also have water bodies landscaped to be part of the structure. It appears as though the swimming pool extends into a narrower canal or moat that runs around the entire hotel structure. I would imagine that there are open spaces such as gardens and lawns around as well.

Even if these are not genuine Indian palaces in the historical sense – since palace hotels are under the management of Taj Hotels – there is scope to build the Oberoi hotels brand around this distinctive feature of luxury extending beyond the hotel room. And whether the Oberoi Hotel is in India or overseas, it can possess this unique characteristic that stands for Indian-international luxury hospitality.

Distinctive characteristics of Oberoi Hotels

- Locations in business and leisure destinations that also offer greenery, open spaces and a sense of quiet
- Luxurious accommodation that is world-class in every sense
- Luxury that extends beyond the hotel room to exteriors and spaces designed for quiet reflection, be it through lobbies and foyers, open colonnades, lawns and gardens, water bodies, and the like
- An exclusive spa area that offers wellness treatments for relaxation and rejuvenation
- Fine dining restaurants that offer the best specialty cuisine and also keep healthy diets in mind
- In every destination, Oberoi must strive to take the local and make it truly international in an elegant way

Brand positioning for Oberoi Hotels

The world of Oberoi Hotels is a pleasure garden for the senses

Brand promise

Only Oberoi Hotels provide luxury stays that relax and rejuvenate you

Tone and manner

- International and luxurious
- Understated and easy elegance
- Speaking the language of a gracious host, equal to guests who stay there

Brand communication strategy (how communication will build the Oberoi Hotels brand)

As I have said earlier, Oberoi Hotels has not cared to advertise or communicate much, at least in India. However, it is time for that to change, as intense competition builds up and Oberoi will need to communicate with its audience of travellers. Persuading customers, or reassuring them of their choice, is the least that Oberoi Hotels can do, in order to retain and reward customers as well as attract new ones.

Oberoi Hotels must continue to participate in international travel magazines' readers choice awards as well as travellers' choice awards, as these lend the brand credibility through an independent source.

However, the advantages of communicating directly with your audiences cannot be overstated and this would include advertising as well as direct marketing. While advertising will speak to a wider universe of international travellers who ought to consider the Oberoi on their next business trip, it will

also reassure current guests of Oberoi Hotels that they have indeed made the best choice and are in great company.

Direct marketing will speak to a select subset of the universe, who are your most coveted, prospective customers as well as those already regular guests at the Oberoi. Communication to the latter group usually takes the form of a customer loyalty programme, that is designed to reward guests for their stay and incentivize them to visit more often.

Direct marketing to prospective customers that the Oberoi must have as their guests can take the form of invitations to events that are likely to interest them as senior and top management in the corporate world. Here, direct marketing would work in tandem with PR to deliver the required results. Once the Oberoi has managed to get the attention of the prospective CEO/CXO and established a connection, it is likely that they will be more predisposed to receive communication from the hotel. This can then be followed through with detailed presentations to the companies' senior teams that make decisions on corporate travel.

Brand Identity for Oberoi Hotels

Although Oberoi Hotels has not advertised much in decades past, I distinctly remember the logo to feature a motif of some kind inside a hexagon outlined shape. I am not sure what that logo symbolized, but it seems to have been recently changed to a golden sun or sunflower, which I noticed in a birth anniversary advert for MS Oberoi that appeared in newspapers.

I don't know what the strategy behind the brand logo redesign is, since there always ought to be one. And when a company or brand changes its logo, there ought to also be advertising for that change, communicating to customers and all stakeholders (including employees) what the logo change represents for the brand.

However, in light of the brand strategy that I am recommending now for Oberoi Hotels, there ought to be a brand identity devised that reflects this new brand positioning.

The new brand positioning of pleasure gardens for the senses is best captured by the Tree of Life art installation inside Oberoi Delhi's lobby - one that is similar to, if not the same as the IIM Ahmedabad logo inspired by the lattice work of Sidi Sayyed Mosque in Ahmedabad. I have always considered that to be the Tree of Knowledge.

Avoiding any logo copyright tussle with IIM Ahmedabad, it would be best if the logo is designed to communicate pleasure gardens for the senses. I have

attempted a few design suggestions which are directions for logo design, rather than designs themselves. From a simple art nouveau design, to a root and branch design that conveys the Indian, or eastern sense of wellness, these are possible directions for the new Oberoi brand identity to go with the brand positioning of pleasure gardens for the senses.



Oberoi Hotels

Pleasure gardens for the senses



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Another thought that I had for the logo is a tree flanked by a bird and a fish on either side, created entirely with the Indian paisley motif in black and gold. This would require the skills of a professional graphic designer or commercial artist, but using elements the Canva design app has to offer, below is my idea direction for it.



Whatever be the final decision on a new brand identity or logo for Oberoi Hotels, it ought to be revealed and announced in a proper manner with advertising explaining its significance.

Creative Idea

We will persuade customers that Oberoi Hotels are pleasure gardens for the senses, by juxtaposing relaxation and luxury with the pressures of travel, especially business travel.

We do this by presenting Oberoi Hotels as the finest relaxation – in mind, body and spirit – that guests would probably not find time for, or indulge in, during the course of their daily lives.

In other words, to travel and stay at the Oberoi is to return rejuvenated and relaxed.

The brand campaign for Oberoi Hotels would comprise TV adverts as well as a print campaign that would feature on international TV news channels and in international news and business news publications, both newspapers as well as magazines.

TV advert #1 (Five elements)

This advert is about the five elements essential to life and Oberoi Hotels interpretation of it in devising hotels stays for their guests.

It is a visual montage that begins with the earth. Scenes from nature as it abounds in many Oberoi Hotel properties. From expansive aerial views of Delhi Golf Course, to lush greenery, gardens with guests enjoying a stroll, the sound of birdsong, we capture the serene atmosphere at the Oberoi.

Moving to water, we dissolve to ways in which water plays an important part in relaxation and wellness at the Oberoi. From water running in baths, to fountains outside, to the poolside and water channels circulating the hotel properties, we experience a sense of calm.

Fire, the energy that we need is captured through scenes in the Oberoi kitchen with the Sous Chef issuing instructions, to a cocktail or dessert in flambé, to romantic candle-lit dinners, and the embers of the sun as it sets on yet another day.

We then visually experience air, or life-breath, depicted through well-ventilated and airy spaces, cool breezes by the poolside, and leaves on the trees rustling in the wind, a woman enjoying a spa/meditation session taking deep breaths, and the like.

And finally, we get a complete sense of space at the Oberoi through its well-lit and ventilated spaces, spacious and uncrowded lobby areas, restaurants that exude a sense of quiet luxury, ceilings and large French windows, before ending on the Tree of Life art installation that is the pièce-de-resistance at Oberoi Delhi.

The music is western classical, and is relaxing in mood and tempo.

FVO: The five elements of life in perfect balance and harmony, with no one ever overpowering the other, is our idea of luxurious hospitality.

To stay here is to feel whole again.

Super: Oberoi Hotels

Pleasure gardens for the senses

TV advert #2 (Time in the Oberoi schemata)

In this TV advert, we visually contrast the quiet stillness within an Oberoi Hotel with the frenetic activity that makes up a typical day in the life of an Oberoi guest.

We juxtapose quick cuts of an Oberoi guest packing suitcase, hurriedly leaving room, driving to airport, making phone calls during journey, catching his flight, with scenes suggesting complete stillness inside the Oberoi, as if waiting for the guest's arrival.

Along with the depiction of the guest's hectic schedule, perhaps he even sees a reference to Parkinson's Law in the newspaper he's reading. There it is, loudly proclaiming: Work expands to fill the time.

While at the Oberoi, we get a sense of space and quiet, perhaps just the sound of a gentle indoor waterfall, or the sound of a piano wafting up from the lobby. No crowds, no jostling, no queues, no rushing about... just peace and an ample sense of time.

FVO: Our gift of luxurious hospitality is to make time expand for you, to make it wait for you, as if it were standing still.

To stay here is to know that you can accomplish so much more.

Super: Oberoi Hotels

Pleasure gardens for the senses

TV advert #3 (Space and well-being)

Film opens inside an Oberoi hotel room, to show us the breathtaking view through the large floor-to-ceiling windows. Camera then turns around as if from point of view of the guest to face the door, before proceeding towards it.

We then have a montage of spaces inside Oberoi Hotels that are thoughtfully designed to give the guest a sense of space and quiet. A quiet little corner where one can gaze out over a garden and read, perhaps. A spacious lobby, where guests can meet for a quiet discussion. The poolside for a refreshing early morning or late evening swim. A garden where one can take a quiet stroll, admire flowers and nature and hear birdsong. A large lawn where one can enjoy afternoon tea. The Oberoi Spa, where you can luxuriate in wellness treatments in an atmosphere of tranquility.

We finally end on a water channel running around an Oberoi hotel property, where we find ourselves on a small portico leading back to a hotel room at the Oberoi.

FVO: A heightened sense of privacy and quiet, in spaces created through an interplay of shade and light, is our key to wellbeing.

To stay here is to return rejuvenated.

Oberoi Hotels

Pleasure gardens for the senses

Brand Print Campaign for Oberoi Hotels

In the print campaign for Oberoi Hotels, we juxtapose the quiet luxury of Oberoi stays with business a little more directly, and we also share a little more about the Oberoi stay, through copy.

To give the reader the sense of space and quiet that is characteristic of Oberoi Hotels, the adverts will feature a lot of white space, with text reflecting the brand's quiet, understated elegance.

Print advert #1:

Headline: Plan your next strategy gazing over this moat.

Body Copy:

It isn't merely that corporate tsars have the luxury of well-appointed hotel rooms and suites at the Oberoi. Sometimes, they have the pleasure of gazing far into the horizon over their own private moat, as it were.

And plenty of time to think and plan their next strategy. Plenty of quiet.

Leave it to our superbly trained staff to anticipate and take care of every need. From a spa treatment to a healthy brunch, to tea on the lawns.

All the space and time you need to explore ideas in luxury, without feeling cooped up in your hotel room.

To stay at the Oberoi is to know that you can accomplish so much more.

Sign-off: Oberoi Hotels (logo)

Pleasure gardens for the senses

Print advert #2:

Headline: Tranquility is good for the soul as well as for business.

Body Copy:

Escape from the high-pressure, hectic business trip. To the luxury and quiet of the Oberoi.

Here, work will not expand to fill the time, as Parkinson's Law insists. Instead, time will wait on you, and peace will reign.

That's because our superbly trained staff anticipate and take care of every need. From a business lunch, to tea in the lobby, to a late afternoon swim.

The privacy and freedom you need to conduct business, in your room and at several other thoughtfully designed spaces at our hotel properties.

To stay at the Oberoi is to experience work-wellness balance.

Sign-off: Oberoi Hotels (logo)

Pleasure gardens for the senses

Print advert #3:

Headline: The colours of India, filled with health and flavours from other lands.

Body Copy:

For the well-heeled international business traveller, the Oberoi is a haven of healthy cuisines.

And whether you're dining alone, or hosting a luncheon or dinner, it's important to know that you can dine well and stay true to your health regimen.

Explore our fine-dining specialty restaurants and bars, ranked highly by connoisseurs from all over the world.

And leave it to our superbly trained staff to take care of every need. From a gluten-free or low-carb diet, to a range of exotic teas.

To stay at the Oberoi is to eat healthy and feel well.

Sign-off: Oberoi Hotels (logo)

Pleasure gardens for the senses

Print advert #4:

Headline: Wellness is not a matter of indulgence, but a way of life.

Body Copy:

At the Oberoi, wellness is not merely a spa treatment. The entire stay is designed around your sense of wellbeing.

From the early morning swim or stroll in our gardens, to a healthy, balanced meal, and quiet atmosphere in which to work, wellness comes in many forms.

Enhanced by an acute sense of peace, space and time that you will feel each time you stay with us.

Besides, you can always count on our superbly trained staff to anticipate and take care of every need.

To stay at the Oberoi is to return rejuvenated.

Sign-off: Oberoi Hotels (logo)

Pleasure gardens for the senses

Print advert #5:

Headline: Immerse yourself in the pleasures and the possibilities.

Body Copy:

Every Oberoi hotel stay is designed to make you feel well and at peace with the world. And no matter how busy your trip is, you will always try and make time for the little pleasures that mean so much.

For an early morning swim is also time to think about your ideas. Leisurely afternoon tea is time to catch up with an old friend.

Besides, with our superbly trained staff anticipating your every need, you are no longer preoccupied with the mundane.

Make the most of all the space and time you sense you have at your disposal here.

To stay at the Oberoi is to simply relax and imagine the future.

Sign-off: Oberoi Hotels (logo)

Pleasure gardens for the senses

Print advert #6:

Headline: Just in case you miss birdsong or the fragrance of gardenia.

Body Copy:

There it is. Right outside your room portico. Or on a stroll through our gardens. The Oberoi stay is designed to keep you connected with the beauty of nature.

Those who appreciate the finer things of life will not merely experience a luxurious sense of time and space, but beauty to admire.

And should you want your tea on the lawns, or brunch by the poolside, our superbly trained staff will arrange it.

All the space and time you need to explore ideas in luxury, within and outside your hotel room.

To stay at the Oberoi is to live life in good taste.

Sign-off: Oberoi Hotels (logo)**Pleasure gardens for the senses****Oberoi Customer Loyalty Programme**

I noticed on the Oberoi Hotels website that their guest loyalty programme is called Oberoi One. It is most uninspiring and doesn't communicate Oberoi's brand of luxury.

I would recommend rebranding this as well, in line with the new brand positioning of Oberoi Hotels.

I also read on the website that Oberoi Hotels are in an alliance with Mandarin Oriental of Hong Kong, a hotel brand that I have mentioned here as competition to Oberoi in brand image terms. If the alliance works like code-sharing in the airlines industry where Oberoi guests are referred to Mandarin Oriental as preferred guests and vice-versa, it does make sense. Why fight them, when you can join them and reap the rewards jointly.

Use of digital media

First, I think the Oberoi Hotels and Resorts [website](#) needs a rethink. It ought to feature important corporate news and information as well as information about its various properties, helping travellers to make their reservations.

This would be best achieved through creating a separate corporate section, distinct from the hotel reservations and offers section.

Next, I think Oberoi Hotels ought to use the digital/social medium as a PR tool, to communicate important corporate and hotel information, such as expansion, renovations, new properties launched, change in management teams, important events hosted at Oberoi Hotels, important dignitaries from overseas staying at Oberoi Hotels, etc.

From what I could see right now on Oberoi's use of [Twitter](#), it appears that they are advertising on Twitter and I am not sure that is appropriate for a luxury brand.

Some thoughts on corporate branding for the Oberoi

I thought I'd conclude this document with a few of my thoughts on branding for Oberoi Hotels at a corporate level and would urge the Company to think along these lines:

- Oberoi is the brand of luxury hotels and resorts that belongs to East India Hotels Ltd.
- There is also another company called East India Associated Hotels Ltd that owns and runs another brand, Trident Hotels, along with a few Oberoi Hotels
- I am not sure of the exact structure of these companies and their ownership of the two brands, but it makes sense to me to have a single consolidated entity which is East India Hotels Ltd, under which there are two separate hotel brands operating
- That said, the reason for the second brand, Trident, to exist must be clear, as must its brand differentiation, which is to say that Trident's product offering, brand positioning and clientele must be distinct from Oberoi Hotels, and yet they must belong to the same parent company brand, East India Hotels Ltd.
- More thought needs to be given to the corporate brand structure and how both brands can thrive and add value back to East India Hotels Ltd.

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