

Design brings the
UK-India Free Trade
Agreement to life



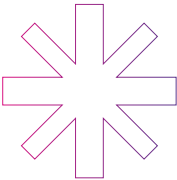
A manifesto for collaboration and shared prosperity

ind!go dba



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About this report

This report draws on two decades of first-hand experience in the UK-India corridor and is the product of a series of meetings that took place in Ahmedabad and Mumbai in July 2026. Those meetings coincided with the enactment of the UK-India Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA).

The report goes beyond a view of design and communications services as exports. It considers them as enablers of business success. This view significantly expands the potential scope of creative services in the UK-India corridor. It offers UK design and communications businesses a way to contribute to India's growth by identifying routes into key sectors.



Those include infrastructure, energy, water, manufacturing, technology, defence, aviation, travel & tourism, healthcare, and retail. All those sectors need industrial design, UI/UX, service and experience design, branding, packaging, storytelling and communications design. These are things at which the UK excels.



The authors met Indian institutions that promote the practice of design and train designers; UK businesses already working in India; Indian companies active in international markets including the UK; creative agencies; and others such as the British Council that promote collaboration between the two nations. A full list of participants can be found on p39.

This report includes a section highlighting the immediate prospects in several key sectors that are important to both countries (p30) and a short list of recommendations (p36).

It is a call to action for the creative industries. More broadly, it is a blueprint for trade bodies in other sectors with a mission to help their members grow in new markets.

About the authors



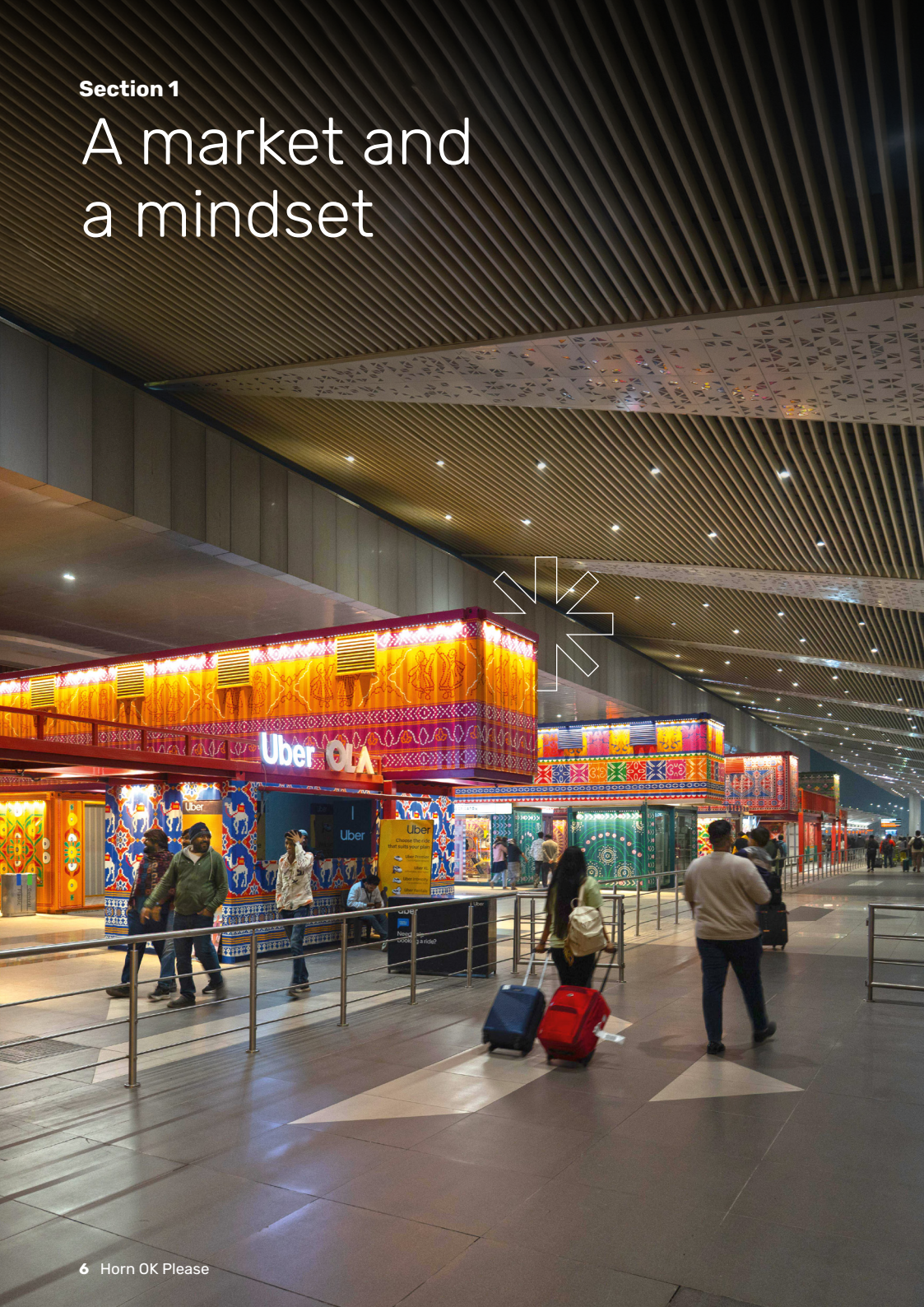
Mark Hannant is a creative services entrepreneur. For the past 18 years he has lived between London and Mumbai. He is the author of *'Midnight's Grandchildren: How Young Indians are Disrupting the World's Largest Democracy'* (Routledge, 2019).



Deborah Dawton is an industrial designer by training who, for the past two decades, has represented the UK design industry as CEO of the Design Business Association (DBA). She advocates the industry's interests to government and helps member businesses increase their competitiveness.

Section 1

A market and a mindset



The international airport in Ahmedabad is a microcosm of modern India. Upgraded in 2023 in preparation for the 2030 Commonwealth Games, the terminus is uniquely Indian. Using facial recognition technology, built on a digital identity system called Aadhaar, passengers make their way seamlessly through spacious halls elegantly decorated with Indian motifs reproduced with a remarkable attention to detail.

Outside, lanes of smart new cars – many electric – pick up and drop off and lull visitors with a short-lived sense of air-conditioned serenity.

Beyond the airport perimeter a different reality awaits. Honking cars fight for space with autorickshaws, tempos, vast swarms of scooters, and handcarts. And cows. Lane discipline is a fantasy, a foreign fetish.

And everywhere trucks – their colourful backsides emblazoned with the sign 'Horn OK Please'. Hand painted versions adorn tens of millions of trucks across this vast country. It is an art form, symbol of economic history and a call to action.

In the UK, honking is heard as aggression. In India, it is a greeting. In India, traditional skills such as hand painting, stencilling, and motif making are still practiced and displayed on trucks and in transit lounges. In the UK, drivers stay in lane, but those craft skills have been lost.

Understanding these contradictions is key to understanding India. It is more than a market. It is a mindset.



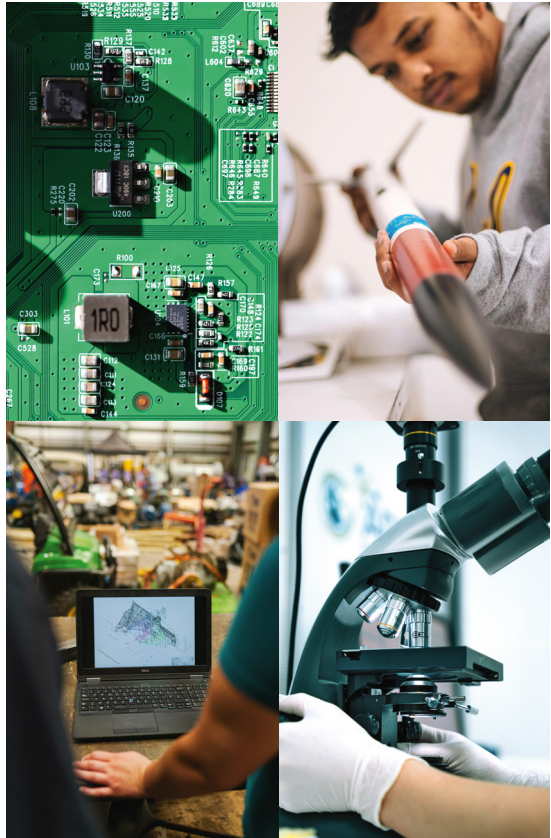
Government sets the scene. Businesses create value

India and the UK are currently the fourth and sixth largest economies in the world, respectively. Trade between the two was worth [£43 bn](#) in 2024 and supports at least [600,000](#) jobs, which contribute to what Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi calls the 'living bridge'. India's economy is projected to become the world's third largest by 2030 and to become home to quarter of a billion high income consumers by [2050](#). No surprise that every boardroom is looking for an India strategy.

UK-India trade is set for [a £25 bn boost](#) thanks to the new [CETA](#) which came into effect in July 2026.

Tariffs are down. Optimism is up. The bilateral relationship has been given a jolt of new energy.

Easier access for UK whisky has made headlines (see p23). Gin, Scottish salmon, medical devices, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics, electric mobility, and aerospace components are also included. UK companies now have access to Indian government procurement – a market worth an estimated [20-22%](#)



[of Indian GDP](#), which could be upwards of £500 bn. Meanwhile Indian textiles and garments, leather and footwear, gems and jewellery, and auto components now have tariff-free access to the UK. More significantly, the deal lets Indian IT and digital firms build platforms from the UK to win high-value work globally.

Governments can establish the trading environment but ultimately it is businesses that create value by investing and generating returns by selling

products and services. That requires familiarity, common purpose, and trust.

The trade deal does not place much store in the creative industries (described in India as the Orange Economy). Surprising given their soft power influence, massive [£126bn](#) contribution to UK GDP, and their place at the heart of the UK's industrial strategy. On the plus side, it does include IP protections, professional mobility, and other 'ease of doing business' measures which are relevant to creative businesses. An associated '[Programme of Cultural Cooperation Agreement](#)', signed in 2025, goes further to promote creative and cultural links.

India is a potential B2C market for the UK's creative sector, from film and fashion to food and football. The Premier League clocked more than [9 bn minutes of watch time](#) in the 2025-26 season according to data published in August 2026 by JioStar, a broadcaster, and market research firm Nielson. India's cultural outputs yoga, spices, Bollywood flicks, and Hindi hits, are already familiar to many folks in the UK. These products are reasonably well catered to by existing trade promotion activities.

The bigger opportunity is a B2B one. Every business that participates in the UK-India corridor has requirements for design and communications. They require regional consumer insights, localised go-to-market strategies, and culturally appropriate content and design. These become the components of cultural fluency.

This report looks at the role of design and communications not just as exports to be tallied but as enablers and multipliers of business success. Through that lens it identifies ways in which the UK and India can build partnerships that will contribute to the growth, wellbeing, and shared prosperity of both economies.



Section 2

India - scale and complexity



India is a huge country of 1.4 bn people. It is the world's fastest growing large economy with annual GDP growth of 7.4% over the past three years according to ratings agency [Fitch](#).

The country is experiencing seismic change as tens of millions of consumers join the middle class and enjoy new spending power. Demand is growing for cars and scooters, media and medical devices, travel and tourism.

It is a young country. Median age is 29 years. These are Midnight's Grandchildren born into an era of economic liberalisation and rapid change. Vast numbers of youthful consumers are new to brands, so their allegiances and preferences are still evolving. This makes India an exhilarating but complex place. Consumer behaviours differ widely between regions, communities, and age demographics. It is far from a single market.



The country is investing in physical and digital infrastructure, including roads and railways, bridges and airports, data centres and defence systems.

The scale of demand can be baffling to outsiders.

One new airport was built every 40 days during the past 10 years. Plenty of international architects, designers, and consultants have played a part in making airports across the country a mix of international gloss and Indian craft.

When it comes to digital infrastructure, a different story emerges.

Aadhar, India's indigenous digital identity system, is used by 99.9% of the country's adult population. Adoption has brought people into the formal economy and increased financial inclusion for tens of millions of formerly unbanked citizens. It is an example of large-scale system design suited to the country's vast linguistic and socio-economic diversity. It is a foundation stone of the India stack – a set of public digital goods – which includes the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), a digital payments' system. UPI handles more than 750 mn transactions daily – that's more than what Visa does globally.

India is designing, not just for scale and complexity, but also for frequency.

Indians grow up surrounded by complexity, ambiguity, and scarcity. This is the context in which Indian designers work.

Frugal design, not *jugaad*

Frugal design is a home-grown response. The approach is to design for constraints which may be financial, technological, infrastructural, and/or social. The Indian Space Research Organisation's Chandrayaan-3 moon lander – made for less than half the cost of the movie *Interstellar* – sits alongside Aadhaar as an example of frugal design.

Frugal design is not *jugaad* – a Hindi term which translates as 'hack' or 'making do' – often associated with corner cutting rather than innovation. While Western business literature has somewhat romanticised *jugaad*, most Indian designers push

back and stress the quality, sustainability, and scalable features of frugal design.

Indian problem solving at scale has wide-ranging applications. UK designers will benefit from exposure to these solutions.

Viksit Bharat 2047* and *Atmanirbhar Bharat

2047 marks the centenary of India's Independence. The government has set this as deadline to achieve Developed Nation status. This initiative is known as *Viksit Bharat*.

Atmanirbhar Bharat means self-sufficient India. The country is keen on capacity building and wants to reduce reliance on imports of products and services.

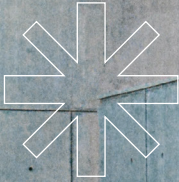
UK companies looking to build their presence in India should be able to show their contribution. Upskilling, knowledge sharing, and co-development are themes that appeal to both government and businesses. Examples include partnerships with universities, job creation, accreditation, jointly funded R&D, integrating Indian suppliers (particularly MSMEs) into supply chains and helping them become exporters. Companies should be seen to do more than sell services. They should position themselves as strategic partners.



Section 3

Meetings and observations

During a week in July 2026 we travelled to Ahmedabad and Mumbai and had 16 meetings. These are the insights we gained.





Ahmedabad: Home of design

Ahmedabad, a city of around 10 mn people in the northwestern state of Gujarat, sprawls along the banks of the Sabarmati River. Several leading Indian institutes are here including the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, alongside other engineering, technical, and medical universities.

Modern technology, traditional craft

Set in a walled oasis in the heart of the city, the **National Institute of Design (NID)** is India's leading design school. Founded in 1961, it was inspired by the vision of independent India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru; nation-building through education, science and creativity. American designers Charles and Ray Eames played a part in its birth; imagining a school where modern industrial technology sat alongside traditional Indian crafts. That ethos endures.

Entrance to the government funded institute is highly competitive. Each year 20,000 hopefuls are whittled down to 750. Successful students study for bachelor's and master's degrees across eight design disciplines: Product Design, Furniture Design, Ceramic & Glass Design, Textile Design, Graphic Design, Film & Video Communications, Exhibition Design, and Animation Film Design. Many alumni are leading lights in film, fashion textiles, and design industries.

Over the decades NID's role has extended far beyond design education into research, consultancy, industry collaboration, and entrepreneurship.

Says Director Ashok Mondal: "Today, this expanding role of design resonates with the vision 'Design in India, Design for the World' articulated by our prime minister which calls upon India not only to develop design capabilities for its own developmental needs, but also to create knowledge, products, services, and solutions that can contribute to global challenges."

He says: "There is significant scope for international collaboration with UK designers to address emerging challenges facing industry from consumer goods to heavy industries, particularly in areas

such as healthcare and medical devices, AI, and robotics."

NID is home to an incubator founded in 2005 which supports NID alumni and other design entrepreneurs. It turns out that designers the world over are not naturally inclined to commercialise their talents. The incubator currently works closely with ISRO to look at space-related domains.

Jitendra Singh Rajput, Incubator CEO and Dean of NID's Gandhinagar Campus, says: "We are promoting design entrepreneurship across sectors ranging from healthcare and mobility to defence, ceramics and glass, toys, and furniture. Through our engagement with emerging and advanced technology domains, including our collaboration with ISRO on areas such as satellite and capsule prototyping, we are exploring how design can contribute to the future of technology and the human experience."



The closeness of NID to the Ministry of Commerce means it has access to some of the bigger challenges and opportunities facing India. For UK design to have an impact, this is a great place to be present.



Creative minds in the 'Age of Imagination'

A 15km drive – honking obligatory – along roads lined with newly built high-rise blocks is the low-rise campus of **MICA – the School of Ideas**. Since 1991 – the year of India's economic liberalisation – it has been training communications professionals and sending them into corporate India at a current average annual starting salary of ₹20 lakh (£20,000).

On the day we visit, director Jaya Deshmukh is grappling with the fact that graduates do well in established large organisations and less so in start-ups. Given India's dynamic start-up environment she needs to resolve that challenge. From her ground floor office, overlooking gardens with parading peacocks, she says: "There's

family pressure to go to big brands. Indian systems aren't geared towards risk-taking. We're introducing an entrepreneurial track to help our students develop an entrepreneurial mindset."

Deshmukh spent much of her career in the UK (in the technology industry) and two years ago returned to her *alma mater*: "I sat in those seats. I know what goes on in those dorm rooms. I have credibility. MICA has been a leading school of marketing and communication management for over three decades. In India's contemporary ecosystem of higher education, the institute is focused on two concepts: the Japanese word *tatakae* – fight, never surrender – and the Sanskrit *tapas* – discipline. For 35 years we've never surrendered our creativity, whatever the current fad."

Her mission is to ensure MICA is relevant in the 'Age of Imagination'. "Age of Imagination is a core aspect of the spine which MICA faculty are equipped with that enables them to train and help students harness imagination at a time when AI is leading to cognitive surrender."

Visiting lecturer Suraja Kishore, a former ad agency boss, says: "We're operating in the orchestration economy. We need to teach young Indians to cope with that chaos. What we do here is required in the UK too so we should look at partnerships. That might be a summit to bring folks together and an incubation lab between MICA and a British creative studio."



I see a post-graduate school and programme rooted in the very best of everything: an amazing oasis of a campus, lush vegetation and purpose-built buildings spread across the site, residential facilities organised around "community," facilities that make even me want to get back to learning and making, and a faculty hell-bent on continuing the tradition of developing their post grads for the world they are walking into – a faculty that is drawn from the very best in industry. The very best of everything invested in these students seems to work – all of them have jobs to walk in to.

A sporting chance

Ahmedabad will host the 2030 Commonwealth Games. The centre piece is the Narendra Modi Stadium. With a capacity of 132,000 spectators, it is the world's largest sports stadium. The infrastructure

work is commissioned but there is a ton of downstream projects still to be bid. The Games require so many areas of design intervention – information dissemination, communications design, uniforms, signage systems - are just some.



Business in the Maximum City

'Mumbai is a place; Bombay is a feeling'. Whatever you call the city by the Arabian Sea, it's all about business.



Next-gen design consciousness

Godrej is a 129-year-old family-owned business group headquartered in Vikhroli, Mumbai. It has a powerful design heritage and long-standing links to NID. It is famous for its steel *almirah* (cupboard) found in almost every middle-class Indian home. A 2019 estimate suggested 120 mn units had been sold. That is an extraordinary example of mass market industrial design. In 2024, the group was divided into two family branches - Godrej Industries and Godrej Enterprises. Between them they hold positions in a vast array of sectors including consumer products, agrichemicals, real estate, aerospace, heavy engineering, defence, energy, and healthcare appliances.



Nyrika Holkar, a UK-qualified lawyer, is executive director of Godrej & Boyce, flagship of Godrej Enterprises, the largely B2B side of the group. Her responsibilities include the Godrej Design Lab established in 2015. More than an in-house design function it connects Godrej to the wider Indian design community. “We are thinking about how to recapture the essence of craftsmanship. India has a rich heritage – monuments, sculptures, architecture, textiles – and somewhere that has been lost. Urban consumption has become homogenised because of globalisation and access to technology. What is the design signature of modern India?” she asks.

One of the Design Lab properties is Conscious Collective, an annual festival to celebrate the future of cities. Its key pillars are: more sustainable building; circular material; and biodiversity. Seven bursaries are awarded annually. Work is showcased and Holkar and her colleagues look at how to scale those projects by connecting them to funding. It feels like a mini Earthshot Prize with more local investment and less publicity.

At the business end of matters, Holkar is passionate about design: “Not about aesthetics but functionality,” she says.

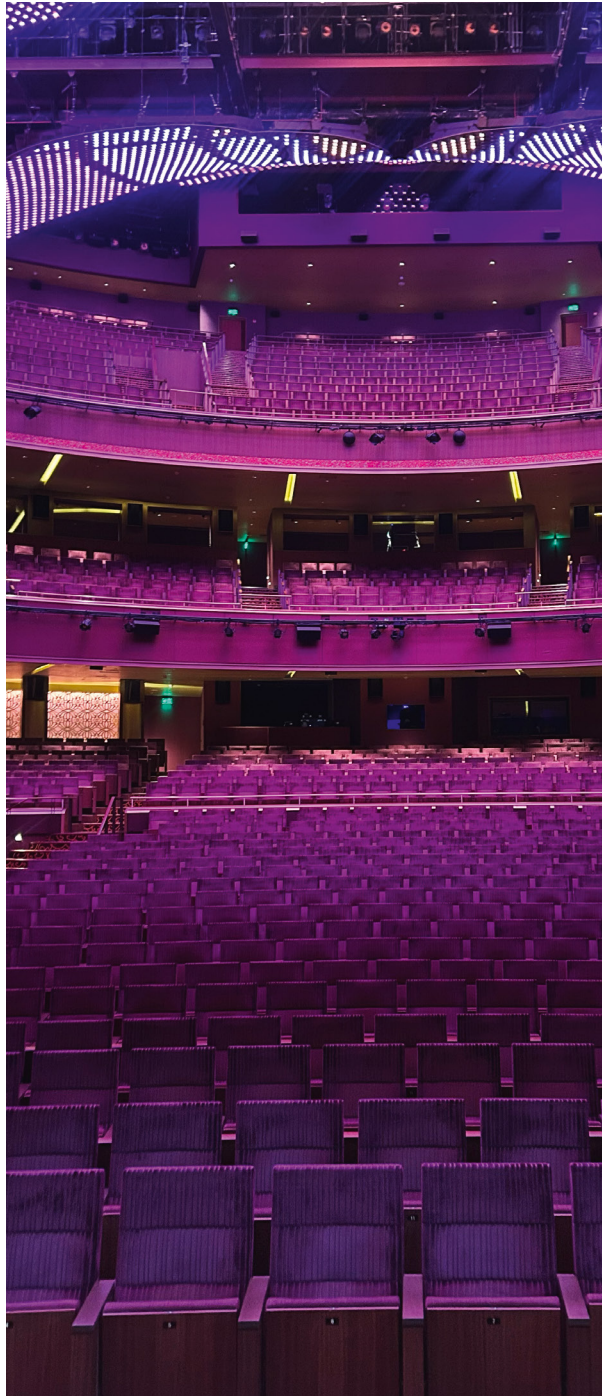
"On the consumer side, how do we design products intuitively for people? On the industrial side the story is perhaps more interesting. We're doing R&D work in clean energy, renewables, space exploration, and an indigenous engine project. The potential to integrate design and mechatronics, where we're exposed to global supply chains, is exciting."



This blend of craft and scale in industrial design is instructive and something we can learn from. I see how it provides Godrej an intimate and privileged place in the Indian home and the mind of the consumer. UK designers should take note. The UK is strong in materials science, sustainability, and clean energy so that's an area where I'd like to see collaboration.

Bold creative ambition

Reliance Industries, led by Mukesh Ambani, is India's largest company by market capitalisation with interests in energy, digital media, and retail, where brands include Hamleys globally and 7-Eleven in India.





Reliance Foundation's **Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC)** is India's premier cultural venue. Opened in 2023 in the heart of Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai's new business district, it boasts a 2,000-seat auditorium plus two smaller, more intimate theatres. It is housed in the Jio World Centre, a massive conference and trade show space with the world's largest passenger lift and a collection of contemporary Indian art.

A behind-the-scenes tour shows no expense spared on audio technology, furnishing, and hospitality spaces. The main auditorium, under a starry ceiling embedded with 8,400 Swarovski crystals, is built for a programming mix including Broadway-scale scale touring shows and Indian classical dance. No frugal innovation here, just world class production and staging infrastructure.



NMACC is a bold statement of India's aspirations. This level of facility oozes confidence. India sees itself increasingly as leader not follower. Indian consumers want the best money can buy.

Blueprint for success

As MD of **Tata Motors**, Ravi Kant spearheaded the company's international growth, buying Daewoo's trucks' business in 2004 and four years later the audacious US\$2.3 bn acquisition of Jaguar Land Rover (JLR). These became the blueprint for expansion under Ratan Tata's leadership. Despite an early hiccup caused by the 2008 crash, the JLR deal became emblematic of India's growth in overseas markets through the purchase of prestige brands.

Kant and his colleagues never tried to turn these foreign companies into Tata brands. "We wanted to be a Korean company in South Korea and a UK company in the UK," he says.

The key to success was to focus on customer needs: "Most successful companies in one geography come with the mindset that what we design in Holland, or the UK should be OK in other markets. It doesn't work that way. Don't tell the customer what they can have. Ask them what they want."



Integrated infrastructure

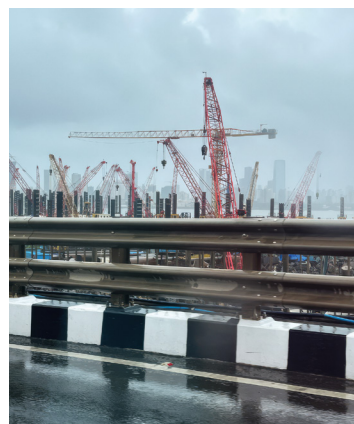
Mumbai's skyline is besieged by cranes. Nine metro lines and a massive coastal road project should eventually make travel easier for the city's more than 20 mn residents. Old buildings are being torn down to make space for new residential and commercial property. The same signs of mass development are seen in most Indian cities.



Arup is a global sustainable development consultancy that believes it can help solve this challenge. It has a 50+ year history in India; its locally-led India group celebrated 20 years in 2026. Sachin Kumar heads the business which now employs around 350 people across four offices and dozens of project sites. In the past decade it has moved from an expat-led business and developed an impressive indigenous leadership team.

Arup works with leading Indian clients and partners across the built environment, including energy, transport, and water projects. Iconic projects include the Statue of Unity, at 182 m, the world's tallest statue, and the Navi Mumbai International Airport. Other work includes a modular design for railway stations developed for the Ministry of Railways and the Australia-India Water Security Initiative. Arup has positioned itself not simply as an engineering consultant, but as a multidisciplinary design, advisory, and technical partner supporting India's long-term infrastructure resilience and sustainable development ambitions.

Kumar: "There is huge potential for UK-India collaboration on infrastructure that creates a lasting legacy. The Free Trade Agreement provides an opportunity to build deeper partnerships based on



shared expertise, innovation, and mutual benefit. The UK should continue to play to its strengths in areas such as urban development, nuclear energy, water, and climate resilience, while supporting India's ambitious growth agenda. There is also considerable opportunity in digital infrastructure, including digital twins and smarter, technology-enabled management of assets”.

He is passionate about skills' development. "My focus is on creating stronger links between academia and industry so that students develop not only technical excellence, but also the critical thinking, creativity, and professional skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world," he says. He is developing an apprenticeship program with the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and would like to collaborate with UK universities.



We should consider how other UK companies can establish themselves as part of the supply chains on large infrastructure contracts. There's a huge B2B opportunity here for downstream participation, if we establish consortiums.



Tariffs down. Bottoms up

Indians like whisky. By volume, it is the largest scotch market in the world. Reduced tariffs on scotch whisky are big news for UK drinks maker **Diageo**.

Says Hiren Dedhia, Diageo India design lead: "Because we're a dark market and can't advertise, the bottle is everything to us. Design is a huge value add. It plays a massive role in packaging and retail touch points. We don't compromise on design. We continue to invest. That comes in two parts – investing in partners (agencies) and the consumer."

Diageo India uses a quartet of UK design agencies – Bulletproof, Design Bridge, Butterfly Cannon, and Studio Minerva – and the bulk of design work sits with them despite recent painful currency swings.

Says Dedhia “We know what they bring to the table. They’re ahead of the curve. They bring us new codes and semiotics.” The recent renovation of McDowell’s illustrates the investment in the consumer. “We’ve introduced codes that you associate with scotch and single malts and redesigned the bottle. This is an entry level brand for us and the consumer is on a premiumisation ladder. They need to see value at that price point.”



UK design companies should take note of the value of sector know-how. It’s one way to approach the question of pricing in India.

WhatsApp and coffee culture

Ashwini Pable, a gamekeeper turned poacher, swapped marketing at MARICO, a huge Indian consumer goods company, for a part-time consulting role with UK design agency **bluemarlin**, bringing a marketer’s lens to design and a strong focus on commercial effectiveness.

She sees India as a unique market. “Indian consumers are increasingly aspirational. They want premium experiences, but value still matters. Brands that balance desirability with



accessibility have a clear advantage.” There are also cultural considerations. “It’s to do with mindsets and ways of working. India is a relationship-led market. A lot of business happens on WhatsApp and over coffee. A call comes at 8pm and you need to take it.” There are commercial realities too. “You won’t get your money in 30 days. Three months is standard.” A depreciating rupee against the pound and dollar can also make servicing India from overseas more challenging.

For Ashwini, these are market dynamics rather than barriers. “India rewards businesses that invest in local relationships, adapt to the way the market works, and commit for the long term.”



Nothing compensates for local insight and building personal relationships.

Ambitious talent hungry for exposure

Lulu Raghavan started her career with Landor in the USA, spent a year in London, and returned to India almost 20 years ago where she ran **Landor** and became India's leading evangelist for branding. She now has a wider pan-Asia remit in WPP and a finger on the pulse of India's creative industries. She is just back from Cannes.

"We want to get away from being seen as the world's back office, and that requires us to talk about the business value of design. Indian talent is ambitious, but it has no lived experience of other markets. That's where collaboration and exposure to international best practice helps," she says.

She has seen the market mature over the past two decades and deserves credit for that shift, but she notes a couple of current challenges: "Most of the folks coming into



Marketing don't know what good design is. And the start-up mindset is to go for PR instead of brand investments when what they need is a value proposition that will secure funding. So, there's still much educating to do!"

When brand book meets ground reality

For 20 years **Kyoorius** has been 'making boring obsolete'. The brainchild of Rajesh Kejriwal, its annual Design *Yatra*, 'journey' in Hindi, was founded to promote his family's paper business. It has evolved into India's premier creative gathering. This year it takes place at NMACC. In a country where many awards events are seen as pay-to-win, Kyoorius awards are seen as credible. Every agency wants to win.

Kejriwal and his co-founder Kay Khoo are sceptical about the opportunities for foreign design agencies or at least their ability to operate on the ground. "We're like 10 countries all put together. Things change every 200 kilometres. Just look at our food cultures. Big Indian companies like the appeal of a US or UK brand agency but the brand book they get handed isn't fit for purpose in India. A brand consultancy in London or New York doesn't understand the nuances of activation on the ground in

India. You can't find a printer in a small town with a Pantone swatch. You must think differently about the work in this market. It's complex," says Khoo.

"The solution," says Kejriwal "is in partnerships. The opportunity is immense for UK design companies to partner or have a joint venture with an Indian company. The global plus local advantage will be immense and companies in India would value this."



The frame of reference changes once you get on the ground in India. You can't change the context, so you have to find ways of working that make sense locally.

Training for the business of creativity

Since 2023 international universities are allowed to open campuses in India. The University of Southampton was the first British one to do so in 2025. Seven UK universities are launching this year and three more in 2027.

The **University of York Mumbai** welcomed the first students to its campus in Powai, Mumbai in September 2026. Courses include a BA (Hons) Business of Creative



Industries. Amrita Sadarangani is Chief Academic Services Officer. "This isn't a design course. We're training young people to work in the businesses that create and distribute creative content. We chose Mumbai because it's India's creative capital. Our mission is to strengthen the infrastructure of the growing 'orange economy'. We've got the infrastructure in place and have shaped the student experience. Now we focus on building community with the city's creative economy."



There's great kudos attached to British education. Local campuses make that accessible to new audiences and that widens the scope of the UK's soft power. Hopefully we also see know-how from India being shared back into the parent institution which increases students' familiarity with India.

Section 4

Design with India

"This was my first visit to India" says Deborah. "The people and food were warm and welcoming. The honking a soundtrack."

She captures the experience in six lessons and a call to action.

- **Lesson one:** Mumbai's beautiful airport has a level of decorative detail that gives a hint of India, but I fear airport design has been largely influenced by global norms. Should it be? There were families sat in large groups on the ground, having a day out to welcome their loved ones back. I don't think the architect planned for that. Let us encourage India to find her design signature.

- **Lesson two:** I envy the multigenerational living and interdependence. We strive for independence in the UK. Individual desire and drive are celebrated. I see more love and care in India. Bring that into design and we will deliver exceptional products and services that work for people, because of our love for people.

Lesson three: Fix-it culture. I saw a 30-year-old rickshaw being propped up by two men while another tinkered underneath it. No taking the vehicle to the garage and waiting three days for a call. There was a queue and you got your fix the same day. Designers need to be designing more responsibly and more sustainably.



- **Lesson four:** Few roads have lane markings. Those that do are ignored. There is no inside and outside lane. But there is something of a ballet to how this all works. Those of us used to order on our roads will want to bring order to this. Let us not assume that our lived experience is what will work somewhere else. Context is everything. Think of a road hazard in the UK – the silent electric car that we do not hear coming. What can we learn from Mumbai's city soundtrack that could solve that problem for us?
- **Lesson five:** What in the UK do we need to bring back? What do we need to unlearn? In the name of progress have we cast aside roles and traditions that would in fact solve some of today's problems?
- **Lesson six:** I saw roads built around trees or trees sat in the middle of pavements, trunks as broad as the pavement. In some places painted trunks and in others, string beautifully woven around their bases. I saw a respect for a species that is all too often in the way in the UK. India is not getting this all right, but its level of respect for living things is something we should adopt in design. How can we design with a mindset that builds and makes better and does not extract and waste?



Learning from each other

There is opportunity for exchange at both educational and professional levels. A UK designer able to spend time in India will be a better designer. An Indian designer able to spend time in the UK will be a better designer. Both will benefit in wildly different ways, and society will be the winner from better designed products and services. Industry needs to understand the opportunity that exists for them if they get this right. A sensitivity to the culture that you are designing for is an imperative.

With a sixth of the world's population living in India, variety abounds, as do customs, languages, and deities. So, design *for* India is not even a thing really. Design *with* India is.

Design with India is about the design sectors of India and the UK both bringing their expertise to the table. A cultural understanding of people and place on one side can be coupled with an international market perspective and deep industry sector knowledge on the other. International market perspective isn't solely the preserve of UK design, but not enough Indian designers have that knowledge and insight yet. Similarly, not enough



UK designers have enough understanding of the people of India to design for them.

Bringing the best of the UK together with the best of India is an exciting prospect. Let us design with a sensitivity for place and culture that encourages growth and development. What can we learn from each other and what might we bring back or cast aside?

It is time for UK designers to get out of the UK curry houses and go to the source of our national dish. They will find a warm welcome.

Section 5

Focus sectors

This section is a snapshot of sectors showing strong growth and a brief look at the type of design and communications activities – both B2C and B2B – that are needed to support them.



Infrastructure

The Government of India (GoI) recognises the need for better integration and design. Its *Economic Survey 2025-26* says: “We need urban infrastructure that is integrated, people-centred and productivity-enhancing rather than fragmented and asset-driven.”

Areas of investment include

Railways: High speed freight corridors, network expansion, station redevelopment, and train upgrading.

Roads: Expressways, economic corridors, and rural last mile connectivity.

Ports: Coastal shipping and inland waterways.

Cities: Metros, housing, sewage, and waste infrastructure.

Energy: Solar and wind power as well as energy storage and transmission networks.

Digital: Digital public infrastructure, data centres, and fibre cables.

Renewables: Green hydrogen, EV charging, and clean transport systems.

Value creation through design

- Placemaking, wayfinding, and behavioural design to ensure that places (from cities to car parks) are productivity enhancers
- Digital design such as digital twins, simulation, and interfaces for remote management of assets
- Integrated mobility systems in urban conurbations
- Communications design that talks about improved citizen experience in a complex, multi-stakeholder environment.



Airports and aviation

India has built one airport every 40 days for the past 10 years and the growth will continue. It plans another 190 by 2047 as part of *Viksit Bharat*.

UK company Arup has partnered with Indian contractors on several recent projects, including the Navi Mumbai Airport opened in December 2025.

Indigo is the world's fastest growing airline. Founded just 20 years ago, its market capitalisation is among the top 10 globally. Its youthful branding and irreverent communications style appeal to India's newly affluent young travellers. Indigo has a pipeline of around 1,000 new aircraft.

Value creation through design

- Service design using behavioural science to improve passenger journeys in airports and connected transport systems
- Digital design and UI/UX in systems such as Digi Yatra, and Aadhaar-based facial recognition systems
- Retail design and customer experience design to meet booming demand in both new passengers and new airports
- Aircraft interiors — a capability at which the UK already excels.



Travel and tourism



India's young travellers want style and functionality at the right price. The best way to understand the market is to stand in the early morning queue for a BOM to DEL flight.

India's tourism market is booming. Travel and tourism were valued at US\$263 bn in 2025 and projected to hit US\$547 bn by 2036, making it the world's fourth largest travel market.

Growth is driven by domestic demand and an uptick in the number of Indians travelling overseas. 32 mn Indians departed in 2025. 603,000 visited the UK and spent £806 mn. Inbound tourism has lagged in recent years.

Mokobara, a Bengaluru-based premium luggage and travel accessories business, has doubled annual revenues for the past three years.

Value creation through design

- Destination branding around locations, hotels, and experiences, particularly in the burgeoning wellness sector

- Editorial content including film and photography for India's mobile-first consumers
- Digital design to support trip planning and bookings as well as virtual tours, navigation, and translation across India's rich landscape of languages
- Accessories including travel and adventure clothing which appeal to young, style-conscious travellers who are new to brands.



Beauty and wellness

The beauty and personal care industry is worth more than US\$30 bn and the domestic market grew 9% in 2025. Affluent urban consumers are pushing demand for premium products. Online sales are booming according to Euromonitor, and digital penetration means growth is also happening in tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

Well-established events such as Professional Beauty India (PBI) are where the industry gathers. VTCT Skills, a UK accreditation business launched in India at PBI Delhi in June 2026.

In July, the Financial Times reported on Indian skincare and fragrance businesses that export, and not just to the Indian diaspora.

Value creation through design

- Packaging design including sustainable materials and the need for ingredients' transparency. Customers want more premium packaging
- Storytelling on traditional Indian remedies and Ayurveda alongside modern formulations
- UI/UX for eCommerce
- Experience and service design – beauty is a ritual and routine and customers value the service component.

Digital, AI & technology

A ₹10 (£0.10) roadside chai can be paid for by using UPI via a phone tap. The indigenously designed system handles more than 750 mn transactions a day. Digital penetration in India is one of its big trends. It had more than 800 mn internet users in 2025, which is around 55% penetration so there is still huge scope.

At the other end of the spectrum, India's IT services giants are investing heavily in AI and building new export capabilities.

Value creation through design

- Systems design to integrate the proliferation of apps in the surging digital economy
- UI/UX for India's AI-enabled solutions
- Design for 'the next billion' that offers voice activation, regional languages, solutions for low bandwidth, and accessibility
- Product and service design and branding for Indian technology giants competing in global markets.

Medical devices

India is experiencing a crisis of lifestyle diseases. The country imports more than half its medical devices into a market worth a massive US\$1tn and seeing double digit growth. Medical devices are part of the government's drive towards advanced manufacturing and production-linked incentives are available to boost domestic production. MedTech is a massive opportunity.

Value creation through design

- Product design that is frugal and sophisticated
- User-centred design that balances engineering excellence with patient experience
- Digital convergence
- Communications design to make complex technology understood.



Clean energy

Keeping the lights on for a nation of 1.4 bn people needs a lot of energy. India is a massive oil importer but is ahead of its targets to increase renewables. In July 2026, it had 164 GW of installed solar capacity and 58 GW of wind capacity. The country wants to have 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030. Green hydrogen is becoming a big Indian story. The UK is a leader in clean energy so expect to see much activity in this space.

Value creation through design

- Systems thinking and service design in line with Gol's mandate to develop integrated infrastructure rather than individual assets
- B2B branding through the clean energy supply chain
- Communications design including visualisations and animations to explain complex technology such as hydrogen
- Investor communications – the energy transition project in India is capital intensive. Indian companies tend to be strong on engineering, less so on communications.

Section 6

Recommendations

The Design Business Association and Indigo CPO see huge scope for UK-India collaboration. Its impact will be greater with Government support. We offer the following proposals for consideration by Government:

1.

Department for Business Innovation, Science and Trade (DBIST) to support establishment of a UK-India Design Export Assembly (UKIDEA) and provide match funding to industry support.

2.

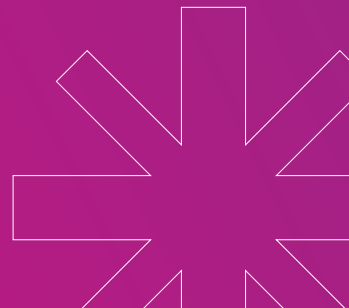
UKIDEA steering group to be chaired by the Design Business Association (DBA) and invitations extended to DBIST; Indian High Commission; India Design Council; MICA – School of Ideas (educational sector representative); and, industry representatives each from the UK and India who will act as ‘orange economy’ ambassadors. Aim to promote the benefit of design for export, spotlight success stories, unlock government support and funding for design sector growth, highlight market opportunities and grow the talent pipeline.

3.

An annual programme of existing industry events and trade missions to be identified at which design can be showcased, in line with the UK’s Industrial Strategy ambitions, especially where design effectiveness is a component of cross-border success. All other government trade missions to include design industry representation and support – travel and accommodation met by DBIST.

4.

Annual report and a series of sector or opportunity specific reports to be produced identifying in detail the design opportunities starting with the seven sectors outlined in section 5 (see p30).



5.

Create a central repository of information, data, connections and activities on existing and future projects and relationships in the UK-India design/comms space. This to include data on partnerships between UK universities and Indian businesses, British Council projects, and commercial relationships where design services are already being deployed in the UK-India corridor in both B2C and B2B. Create a set of success stories.

6.

UKIDEA to contribute design and communications know-how to British Council's student exchange programme.

7.

Appoint an industry specialist to a business development role in India to provide advocacy for UK design industry, to build an ecosystem, identify channels/events/trade shows where UK and Indian businesses are gathered, and deliver deals for companies in the design sector. Feasibility study to look at the prospects for UK design companies to bid for work associated with the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad.

8.

UKIDEA to establish a programme of professional exchange to build design capabilities, experience and knowledge in both markets. Could utilise existing visa options.

9.

Initiate an UKIDEA programme that supports UK design and business leaders to visit Indian institutes such as MICA and NID to deliver lectures and Indian design and business leaders to speak at UK design industry events.



The DBA is the trade association for the design industry in the UK. We are responsible for representing the sector and developing their ability to thrive on two fronts, in the context in which they operate, the business climate, and in their skills and knowledge to be able to do that. We champion the impact design can have and we're the world-authority on design effectiveness. We're an industry membership association owned by its members and a not-for-profit.

With a growing international membership of corporate brands who have over the last five years been investing heavily in growing their in-house teams of designers, it has never been more important to demonstrate the impact design can have. What sort of return should any business expect of its investment in design? The DBA Design Effectiveness Awards is a programme that seeks to answer that question and rewards those design case studies that have met their objectives, and in most cases, far exceeded business expectations.

The DBA is instrumental in bringing the industry together to discuss the issues of the day hosting between 40-60 events a year, online and in real life. We have a suite of training courses developed specifically for the sector, and we undertake an annual survey for our members that enables them to benchmark their performance across a host of KPIs against the rest of the industry.

We are the industry voice into Government working with them to grow the Creative Industries, to encourage the export of design services, and tackle key issues such as the need to develop the talent coming into our industry. Anyone working in the design industry can join the DBA and support the sector they are proud to be a part of.



creative process
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With offices in London and Mumbai, Indigo CPO/magenta is the only specialist B2B content and communications design business in the UK-India corridor. With more than 15 years' experience, co-founders Mark Hannant and Munni Trivedi are among a small number of adventurous entrepreneurs who have already put down roots and built networks that will help the next wave of businesses understand the opportunity and find their way in India.

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