

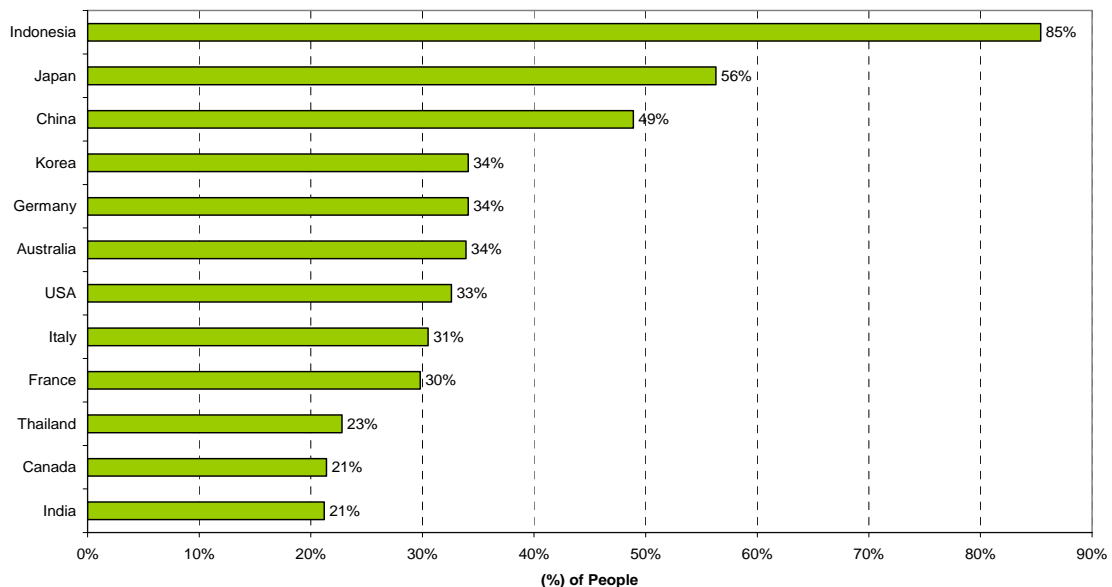
“A Ford Now As Good As A Toyota...”, heard across the USA.

Sitting in a hotel room in Detroit last week, watching a new television commercial for an old client, I couldn't believe my ears as I heard the voiceover. The mighty Ford Co. was now claiming that it was as good as a Toyota. Two decades ago, they were “Japanese tinpots”; today they are the gold standard of family cars in the United States. The content of the message was no surprise, but the candid admission by the inventor of the Model T to everyone over the airwaves was almost unbelievable. Hearing it in Car City added to the irony. An American icon was appealing to fellow Americans, to be American and buy “Made in USA”. We don't hear that in Indonesia as often as we perhaps should.

In moderation, there's nothing wrong with being tribal. Many deep down, some very vocally and a few even violently. The United Nations has more than double the number of member countries today than it had when the world body was first instituted, simply because there are more people who fought hard for their rights and their cultures. As members of any community, we do what we can to help promote local jobs, enrich the local population, not only our nations. That sense of national and cultural identity is expressed in different ways, even with the wallet. Asked which countries they are “mostly likely to buy products made in”, eight out of ten Indonesians named their own country. That is a high number by any standard, a celebration of national pride and community spirit.

This finding from Roy Morgan Single Source does not mean that Indonesians will buy “Made In Indonesia” at any price or of any quality. In that sense, they are as American or Japanese or Australian or anyone else. Value for money will always be the first priority, but “made in Indonesia” will remain a preference if every other criteria in the process of decision-making is more or less equal.

COUNTRIES FROM WHICH INDONESIANS ARE MOST LIKELY TO BUY PRODUCTS



PT. Roy Morgan Research, Wisma 46, Kota BNI, 17th Floor, Jl. Jend.Sudirman Kav. 1 Jakarta 10220

Tel: (021) 572 2021 or 572 7529 Fax: (021) 572 4864

411 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, G.P.O. Box 2282U, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia

Tel: (03) 9629 6888 Fax: (03) 9629 1250 (03) 9224 5387 Email: melbourne@roymorgan.com

Website: www.roymorgan.com

Offices also in: Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, London, Auckland and USA

The hierarchy of preferences measured does offer a few surprises. Of all other countries of manufacture, Japan leads with 56 per cent of Indonesians giving them the thumbs-up. China follows with 49 per cent, Germany, Korea and Australia all at 34 per cent. USA is at 33, Italy at 31, France at 30. Then there's a sharp drop to Thailand at 23, Canada and India completing the Top 12 with 21 per cent. The United Kingdom is No 16, lower than Spain, Sweden and New Zealand, but ahead of Chile and South Africa.

In fairness, the question is a broad indicator of products in general. Had the questions focussed on fashion or cosmetics, cars or electronics, food or beverages, the results would have been different. But the world is changing, slowly but surely. Those who are glued to the old order will find those changes discomfoting. Last month, Ford sold its Jaguar and Land Rover brands to India's Tata Group. The automotive industry and car buyers the world over can expect a turnaround. We are likely to see the big Jaguars to be "handmade in England" at a loss, and millions of new small ones to be robot-made for aspiring car buyers across Asia. This side of the world, Indians got rid of their colonial hangover many years ago and hopefully Filipinos will lose the last vestiges someday soon. That Australia's fortunes are inextricably linked with Asia's march forward is old news now.

Across the world, that adjustment is a continuing struggle for many. For the 2 billion people who live in comfort on this planet today, it should be obvious that the maintenance of their lifestyles in the future is dependent on the conversion of 2 billion on the fringe who could become consumers of more products and services, tomorrow. Then, there's yet another 2 billion living in abject poverty who could indeed fuel further growth, the day after tomorrow.

To do this responsibly, "thinking global and acting local" will need to be more than a slogan for world-stage aspirants. Petty or not, parochial old habits die hard. As always, a handful of courageous managers will show the way to the millions of followers doing their jobs by the book everyday, without imagination. This will happen at a global level, at a regional level, at a local level and not necessarily in that order. Today, initiatives taken at any level become apparent and transferable rather quickly, with technology making transfers so much easier. Indeed, many of those new technology companies are shining examples to others seeking to reinvent themselves. That's as true in Indonesia as anywhere else.

Understanding and monitoring those issues seamlessly at each level, with reliable metrics that transcend national boundaries, is the need of the hour. A few have realised this and are working hard to put robust tools in place, shared by industries at large. Good common tools cost a lot to build, proprietary "tunnel vision" has no value at all. Old cronies clinging to old habits and old yardsticks fail to notice that the old yard itself is no more. Conversely, we should remember that NASA spent millions trying to invent a ballpoint pen that would write upside down in space, while the Russians settled for the good old pencil at no cost at all.

These observations are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the largest syndicated consumer survey in Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. Pilot studies have also been conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. The opinions expressed are my own.

The writer can be contacted at Debnath.Guharoy@roymorgan.com