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**THE GOOD LIFE - BUY 1 GET 1 FREE**  
**Messages of Outdoor Advertising**  
**for Social Change in Urban India**  
**Mette Gabler**

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# **The Good Life – Buy 1 Get 1 Free**

## **Messages of Outdoor Advertising for Social Change in Urban India**

**by Mette Gabler**

Herausgeber:

**suedasien.info**

Südasiens-Informationsnetz e.V.

Reichenberger Straße 35

D - 10999 Berlin

Tel.: 030 – 788 95 411

Fax: 030 – 788 95 253

Email: [kontakt@suedasien.net](mailto:kontakt@suedasien.net)

Internet: [www.suedasien.info](http://www.suedasien.info)

Spendenkonto:

Konto 7170695008

Berliner Volksbank

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## Opening

On the streets of New Delhi one is surrounded by a roar of life. A sensuous overflow of visual, audible, emotional and scented stimuli swirl through all spheres of the city. The public space offers all of these and we choose from and react to the overall blur. Images and text provided on billboards, movie hoardings and posters are one of the main visual inputs. Advertising are part of most cities' canvasses and can be described as a key site that mirrors culture and society and simultaneously influences the same.

Corporate executives utilise advertising based on the assumption that it has an effect on consumers' purchasing behaviour (Mazzarella 2003:25-27). Beyond the objective to sell products and services, advertising is noted to "affect social attitudes, define social roles and influence cultural values" (Ciochetto 2004:1) which illustrates the potential power of such media.

American based anthropologist William Mazzarella, in his studies on advertising and globalisation in contemporary India (2003), describes messages of marketing and advertising as a constant deliberation between the local and the global, culture and consumerism, as well as the abstract and the concrete (2003:3, 17-18). As such, the possibilities of advertisement communications are highly complex and diverse. In this essay I propose to discuss this multifaceted nature of outdoor advertising, the public space and the communication within. I will pay special attention to the potential of challenging existing gender norms through commercial messages.

## Theoretical Considerations

In order to understand the scope of this essay it is necessary to touch upon the foundation carrying its rationale. As a fundamental concept the construction of femininities and masculinities are build on the theory of *social constructionism*. Gender is thought of as a social construct and as a result not possessing inherent natural traits. What constitutes a woman or man is created through time, space and context and characteristics are considered learned behaviour and re-enforced through the socialisation process. Ultimately, these are illustrated through stereotypical images. Perceptions of what constitutes femininity are deeply rooted in cultural and social convictions and hence differ in various contextual settings. It is therefore essential to consider perspectives according to the contextual setting of cultural, historical and demographic influence (Caplan 1993: 1-9; Burr 2003). The belief in the social creation of peoples' characteristics means that these constructions are changeable and can be altered by intended or unintended influence. At the same time it is crucial "that we take a critical stance towards our taken for granted ways of understanding the world including ourselves" (Burr 2003:2-4).

Similarly to the various possibilities of gender constructs one must take the differing possibilities within localities into regards. As feminist Chandra T. Mohanty pointed out, so-called third-world women are not a homogeneous group, not only differing from country to country (Munshi 2001:6-7) but also within countries, societies and localities. Especially in urban areas and with the growing mass media coverage one can speculate on an increased blend of multiple existences that differ immensely despite geographical closeness.

Here we can introduce the concept of *trans-cultural* existence as explained by media scholars Andreas Hepp and Martin Löffelholz (2002). Cultural differences are here considered to penetrate all parts of societies. It is therefore not possible to suggest and limit cultural characteristic to a certain locality. The way globalised media-culture has perpetrated in particular most spheres of urban existence has created a *connectivity* that transcends the perception of regional cultures. Trans-cultural communication has in the end created a *detritorialisation* of culture (Hepp & Löffelholz 2002:12-14; Hepp 2009:14-17). Urban public spaces can be viewed as a miniature universe of a trans-cultural world due to the presence of manifold and highly diverse audiences within.

Despite the difficulties of categorising the world, gender relations continuously seem to be the foundation of control and politics (Caplan 1993:1-9) and as a result the construction of feminine identities is a way to enforce control over women's lives (Munshi 2001:7). As such, characteristics of women and the expected attitude and behaviour have evolved into a "socio-symbolic site" (Fernandes 2000:623), exemplified in the discourse of women representation in media and advertising.

## **Advertising in India**

During the last century the advertisement business in India has grown immensely after the first agencies established themselves as early as 1905. Since then the Indian subcontinent saw the launch of several companies but it was not until the 1990s that the transformation of the industry became increasingly visible. The economical liberalisation and media reform initiated already in the 1980s by the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi opened the market for foreign advertising companies as well as brands and products (Schneider 2007; Mazarella 2003:12-14; Ciochetto 2004:1-4). The concept of *Edutainment* was introduced into Indian television by creating the ideal Indian family unit and illustrating desirable values which Purnima Mankekar argues were designed to push national identity with the family unit as the foundation (Schneider 2007:820-822). The reform politics were instigated and maintained by later Prime Minister Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh. The results of the combination of media utilisation and liberalisation process of financial politics became increasingly visible since the 1990s (Das 2002:319; Fernandes 2000:613; Schneider 2007; Munshi 2001:79) and have affected the street picture throughout India.

Advertising in India is intrinsically linked to the growing middle classes and related growth in consumerism. In 1995 India was seen as “the fastest growing and largest consumer market” (Ciochetto 2004:3). The seemingly closed group of the *Indian middle class* is however not definable with specific characteristics fitting all.

The range of people who are said to belong to this group are counted to somewhere between 80 – 250 million people, illustrating the disparities of measurement indicators (Favero 2005:18-19). In popular discussions the average middle class person is often referred to as one who “received schooling, speaks English, has a house made of bricks and possesses some kind of transportation vehicle” (Favero 2005:18) or “rich, modern, western-exposed and English-speaking urban dwellers” (O’Barr 2008). These definitions can however not capture the immense diversities that exist also within the group. Differences according to locality, religion, income etc. have evolved over time, which results in an extremely heterogeneous grouping. Consequently, there are no characteristics that describe every individual at all times who is included. After independence the middle class was depicted as followers of Gandhian and Nehruvian ideology and obtained a focus on education, status and respect wrapped around notions of social responsibility (Varma 1999: 28-41). With time their power to purchase luxury goods grew. Author Pavan K. Varma and the sociologist Dipankar Gupta agree that with growing consumerism the social commitment was lost (Favero 2005:18-19 Varma 1999: 170-175 + 186). On the base of complex definition of the contemporary middle class, I find that this group can not be deemed having a common lack of social consciousness, as multiple examples of voluntary and/or professional activism exist in various forms in both rural and urban India.

The most useful definition in my opinion is a group that have the power to purchase luxury items or are financially able without having the economic stability of e.g. big company families and upper classes. As seen, the numbering of how many people are included is difficult, some even count up to 300 million. And even though this is only 30% of the population they have an important measurement of the economical growth of India and the consumerist potential present. An important subsection of this group is women as consumers and buyers through a newfound independence and entry into the workforce, in many urban settings (Ciochetto 2004:3, 9). It is ambiguous whether the increased purchasing power among the urban middle class or expansion in advertising due to liberalisation came first. Most likely seems to be a parallel development that fed into each other during the constant cultural, economic and social changes taking place.

**Picture 1: January 2009, oversized billboard (notice the minivan), Kerala.**



Outdoor advertisement (billboards, posters, hoardings and most recently digital media) excludes television media, print media in magazines and internet which are generally the biggest forms of advertising. Even though outdoor advertising was said to only hold a part of 5.5% of total advertising in the years from 1993-1997 (Ciochetto 2004:6) the amount of billboards and other outdoor media has in the new millennium spurned different activities of restrictions to limit the numbers and size of hoardings (see pictures 1), especially because many are suspected to be illegal (Blecken 2009).

Without regulation it seems that international branded stores, local industries as well as small general stores contribute to an atmosphere of so-called visual pollution (see picture 2, 3).

**Picture 2: January 2009, Billboard and poster overflow, Kerala.**



**Picture 3: December 2008, Billboard overflow, Godawlia crossing, Varanasi.**



Attempts to limit the number of advertisements seem to encounter difficulties and urban settings and areas along the highways in particular, are generally plastered with messages.

Parallel to the growing occupation of space by advertisements, which illustrates the expansion in consumerism, governmental sponsored advertisements too increased during the 1990s. Tourism ads, army recruitment and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns were launched to influence public perception and behaviour (Ciochetto 2004:5). This development continued into the new millennium where polio prevention and family planning ads spring up alongside a multitude of political ads (Ciochetto 2004:10).

During my stay in New Delhi in the autumn of 2008 I noticed a great number of advertisements for HIV/AIDS awareness; still a hot topic in international development and acknowledged as an issue of priority in governmental bodies (see pictures 4, 5, 6).

**Picture 4: October 2008, near A.I.I.M.S (one of the biggest hospitals in New Delhi), Safdarjung, New Delhi (“Go for Condoms”).**



**Pictures 5, 6: October 2008, bus station near A.I.I.M.S, Safdarjung, New Delhi (“Drugs & Life have nothing in common. Not even an alphabet. Stay away from drugs” “AIDS. A condom is the best known aid against AIDS”).**



Other campaigns run by official bodies or international organisations were concerned with drug use as seen above. The city picture is further beautified with messages regarding malaria, tuberculosis, voting for the municipal elections, traffic rules and private water management which shows the range of topics addressed and visible in the public domain (see pictures 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13).



Picture 7: February 2009, tuberculosis awareness campaign, Chanakya Puri, New Delhi. (Translation: “I still have a bad cough. What should I do?...”)



Pictures 8, 9: November 2008, BJP election campaign, Safdarjung Enclave and Green Park market, New Delhi. (Translation: “Give the BJP your vote” “Bharatiya Janata Party. Make Rambhoj win”)



Pictures 10, 11: November 2008, voting campaign, near Red Fort, Old Delhi.  
(Translation: “This time I will surely vote.”)



Picture 12: February 2009, highway sign on the way to Gurgaon, New Delhi.



Picture 13: October 2008, saving water campaign, near Lodi gardens, New Delhi.



In addition, I found a great amount of advertisement by humanitarian organisations for support and membership, which were most intriguing to me. These were a type of advertisement I had not seen during any of my travels to India in the previous decade.

The vast amount of public announcements coupled with consumerist advertising means that the potential range and variety of ads in the public sphere is huge, with countless opportunities for communication. This illustrates the deterritorialisation of cultural messages as global, local and national communication is found throughout the city.

The advertisements that fascinated me most however, were those that challenged existing social norms and attitudes, regarding for example gender or beauty, at the same time as selling a product (see pictures 14, 15).

#### Pictures 14, 15:

October 2008, Ad for Mail Today, Street corner Jor Bagh, New Delhi.

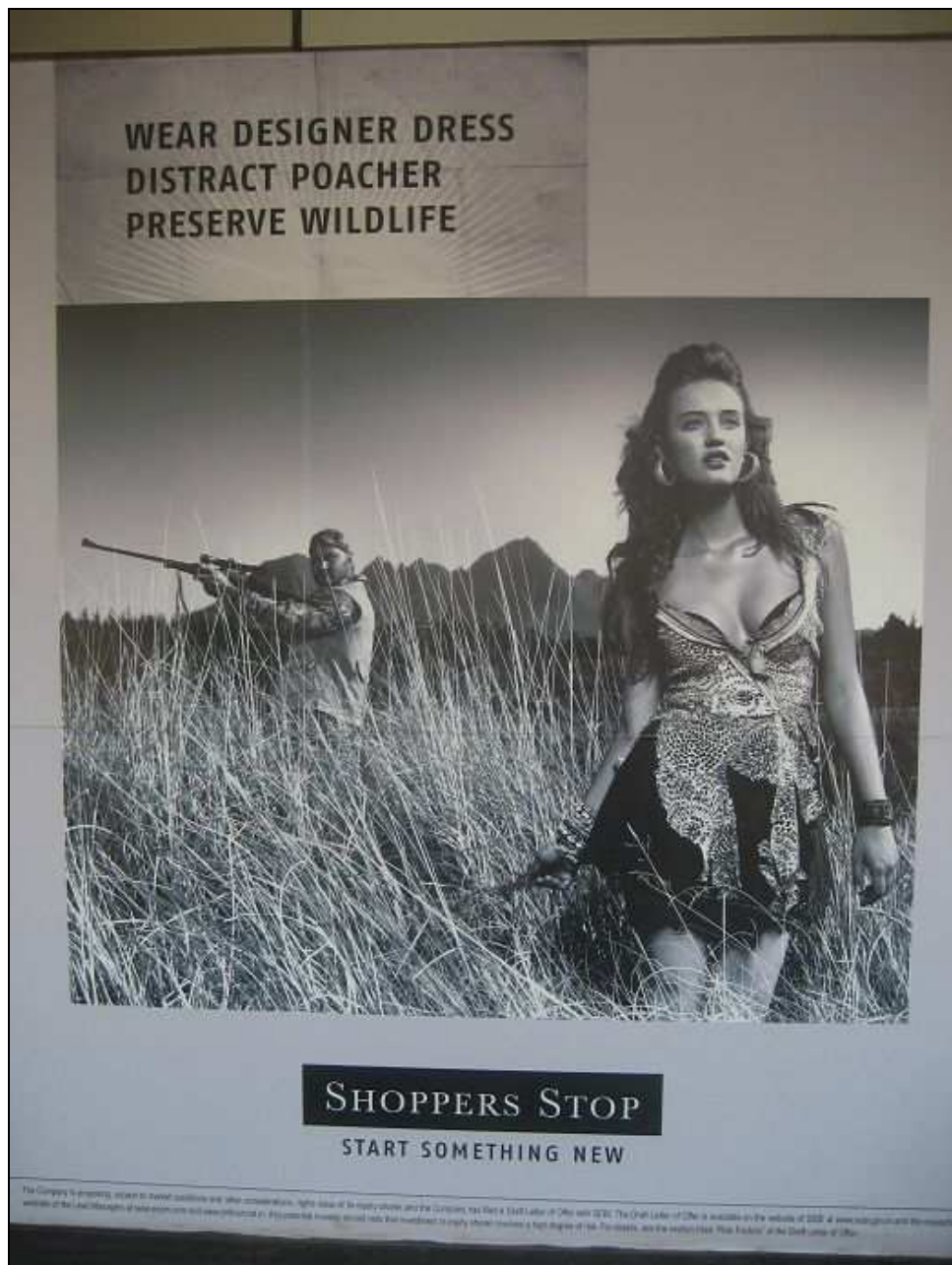


In the past, advertisements have in particular utilised the perception of beauty in their campaigns, e.g. whitening cream ads play on the issues of dark skin complicating employment (Ciochetto 2004:9). Body image thus becomes a vehicle for sales and reinforces a simplified beauty ideal. Shifts concerning the perception of beauty in advertising have however been noticed already in the 1990s where the growing consumerist culture and increase of women's independence is linked to the changes that detached themselves from mere approval of men to self-fulfilment (Munshi 2001:82). This demonstrates the linkage of constructions of femininity to growing consumer culture. Similarly, the Mail Today ad recognises the existing beauty ideal, but at the same time challenges this idea by stating it as outdated and “yesterday”. Thereby, this ad opens a possibility to be lovely despite not fulfilling the usual beauty ideal of fair skin.

This inspired me to see consumer advertisements as having the potential to challenge society's attitudes and values toward increased social responsibility, social change and greater social equality. Other examples I found were concerned with environmental issues while selling lingerie, or wildlife preservation while advertising for garments (see pictures 16, 17).

**Pictures 16, 17: October 2008, ad for Shoppers Stop, Metropolitan Mall, New Delhi.**





## Discussion

When analysing messages in outdoor advertising, there are various possibilities of effect and outreach. Advertisements can, by combining different statements, be defined as “presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services /.../ intended to persuade or to influence buyers in their purchasing decisions /... /by using strategies that rework culture, creating aspiration and new desires” (Ciochetto 2004:1). At the same time mass media in general, to which advertising belongs, as a means of communication, is seen as a social sub-structure that represents an intrinsic variable in the process of social change (Reddi 1989:396). As such, advertising has a dual function. On one hand the message is persuading people to choose a certain brand or product to improve living standards. The good life is sold to the buyer when choosing a specific brand. At the same time - enclosed in this

message - one can find deeper significance of the advertisement which has the power to influence attitudes and eventually even behavioural patterns that challenge existing social and cultural systems. Ideally, this should improve some people's life and give them the possibility for equality that previously might have been limited.

Media scholars, development planners and conscientious citizens alike are concerned with the positive and negative impacts of media upon society. Advertising and media in general is often deemed to have negative effects on audiences. One concern is the creation of a super-structure or mainstream that results in a perceived majority that "dominates public taste and cultural norms" (Reddi 1989:410). Thereby, alternate desires and behaviour are deemed abnormal. In this sense, the creation of desires and wants leads to the creation of new class divisions, destructive for a multicultural and diverse society. A common critique of advertising is its role in reinforcing existing stereotypical images of men and women and traditional values that conflict with changes taking place in society (Reddi 1989:410-411). Consequently, the possibilities of challenging such stereotypes seem to be an impossible task when the media constantly affirms the gender separation and traditional roles, as for example in many ads that contain women as mothers and wives in charge of household chores, child care and cooking or as possible brides being dressed in beautiful traditional saris to attract possible suitors for marriage as was the case in much of the advertising in the 1960s and 70s (Munshi 2001:82).

On the other hand there is an opportunity for media to operate as a powerful tool to catalyse social change. Due to the conviction of media's potential to influence behaviour, advertisement is considered to have a positive effect on development when used to mainstreaming new values. In many incidents media can also exemplify certain issues that are part of restrictive customs or practices that need to be addressed. It may thus broadcast the necessary debate outwards (Reddi 1989:404-411).

When discussing the effects on the audience, one common opinion states that advertising reflects the desires and attitudes of individual consumers and, that successful ads are always based on already existing social norms and values. This means that agencies choose strategies and messages that already persist in mainstream opinions in order to be appealing to the future buyer and as such do not initiate changes that are not already persisting (Mazzarella 2003:13-26).

This is however a simplified view of the reality of the audience. Especially in outdoor advertising the public is a mass of people that can be from any class, caste, age, gender income and educational background and can by no means be categorised as homogeneous with similar attitudes. This reflects the essence of trans-cultural existences in a specific location.

To a higher degree this multi-geneous group is diverse, multifaceted and contradictory and can be expected to react to messages in various ways. As such, the audience in the public



space can be characterised as being unstable and uncontrollable and the effect of advertising may thus be difficult to predict.

Other factors that influence the possible impact of media include literacy, income and language (Ciochetto 2004:5). What connects all these three issues is education in that a family's income dictates the possibility for education and thus literacy and language skills. Even though the English language was still considered an anomaly in Indian advertising in 1997 (Mazzarella 2003:13), many campaigns are now written in English or in a mix of Hindi and English i.e. Hinglish, used in northern India. Even though local languages are also used throughout the country the use of English in outdoor advertisements might exclude groups of people who lack these skills from the communication process. This reflects the advertisement sector's choice of targeting the middle class as the main audience (Ciochetto 2004:9). Still, even the so-called educated part of the Indian population should not be considered to be a homogeneous group. Some might for example hold so-called modern values that stand in opposition to the traditional views when it comes to for example social constructions of femininity and beauty. Some might argue that depiction of women in so-called western clothes or in sexual suggestive poses is a symbol of harmful increased westernisation of Indian culture and should be excluded from media. The politicisation of the discourse becomes a differentiation between the Indian population and tradition as inherently moral, and the opposed immoral western population. Any so-called liberal attitudes might be deemed "foreign inspired... that will surely corrupt Indian womanhood" (Uberoi 2001:169). By adopting the views of social constructionism and the notions of global media communication that has eliminated cultural traits according to locality, the we-them dichotomy is faulty.

Due to the high illiteracy existing in India, most companies choose to use television and print media as their main campaigning space. In the year 2000 89% of the total advertisement campaigns were in TV, magazines and newspapers (Ciochetto 2004:5). It is however debatable whether TV is the main media channel among the illiterate. Some note the growing television outreach, also in rural India (Hepp 2008:7) but the possibility of owning or having access to a television is still more likely to be a privilege available to groups of higher income and thus of higher education.

Outdoor advertising – be it concerning consumer goods and services, public announcements or movies – are communicative tools that do not demand previous actions by the spectator. The audience is not required to buy a television set. They do not have to buy a ticket for a movie or a magazine. Outdoor advertisements are available for everyone and anyone passing by. As long as the by-passers have not lost their sight an advertisement placed outside has the potential to reach a multitude of trans-cultural existences in the surrounding area. These areas are usually busy streets and highways, markets, neighbourhoods, shopping areas and malls, as well as metro and bus stations (see picture 18).

Picture 18: January 2004, market near temple, Puri, Orissa.



The public space is the ultimate association of multitudes of a fleeting mass consisting of a very diverse representation of class, caste, religion, age, gender, income and educational groupings. As a result, the effect and impact of outdoor messages is hard to predict. As mentioned the immense diversity of the mass can be referred to as part of a trans-cultural mass, ever changing (Löffelholz & Hepp 2002). And even though this is considered to be a phenomenon of the globalisation age, I argue that trans-local cultures have always existed through travellers, trade and adventurers. The difference to today's trans-cultural world is, according to Hepp, the physical presence and speed through which mediated communications and thus cultures can be shared, keeping in mind that still not the entire population is connected and that aspect of power relations among media messages exist (2009).

Similarly, dependant on the area chosen for a billboard certain population groupings might be of higher densities than others. Examples exist of campaigns that are designed for use in

rural areas, making them rural specific (Ciochetto 2004:6-8), but it is in urban settings that the possibility for catalysing social change is greatest as the mass of people passing and being potentially affected by the message is greatest.

Urban population can in theory move freely between many areas, but some neighbourhoods and areas automatically attract certain kind of people e.g. shopping malls will not have many people with low income in their vicinities. However, many upscale markets that attract middle and upper class people will simultaneously also see low class groupings for the reason that there are opportunities to make money in such places. I propose that most areas and public spaces will, despite separation among class and caste, still see individuals from all sections of the strata e.g. an up-scale neighbourhood is still dependant on waste-pickers presence. These can be seen to live nearby with their families (see picture 19).

**Picture 19: October 2008, neighbourhood waste dump, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi. (“I’m not fair but I’m lovely. I’m not yesterday.”)**



In addition, the emergence of the metro in New Delhi, which is affordable for all, demonstrates that the availability of messages for an audience that is a mixture of class and caste is higher than anywhere else. The possible amount and diversity of advertising in these areas is vast (see pictures 20, 21).

Pictures 20, 21: February 2009, Metro Station Central Secretary, New Delhi.



It is within all these spaces that images and texts can be examined as communicative tools with several possibilities of meaning, manipulation, influence and persuasion. The question apparent is in what ways the image is combined with the text or slogan. Is the message only understandable with the text? Does the image contain another message on its own? And in what ways does the audience receive the two on their own and in combination? Even

though images and photographs are strong communicative tools to focus desire and create identification (Mazzarella 2003:49-50) the possibility that messages and language choice are excluding illiterate or non-English speakers is still apparent. Moreover, advertising messages might only make sense to people of a certain background and as such only speak to that particular group which already lives out certain values not held by the rest of society.

This can be highlighted through examples of advertising incorporating values and cultural symbols to influence buyers' choices. The benefit of the product is no longer the main issue of advertising. Consequently, values connected to a certain brand are connected to personal choices in life, in general. This is seen in campaigns utilising nationalistic symbols and slogans and hence combine political discussions with consumerist objectives (Schneider 2007:823-824). The connection made between the product and traditional Indian values and Indian identity was regarded as an effective sales strategy and used by foreign brands, international advertising agencies and local businesses alike (Ciochetto 2004:8-9; Mazzarella 2003:14-16; Favero 2005; Fernandes 2000:614). In this way the product is made relevant to local cultural and social processes (Mazzarella 2003:23). Additionally, the increased purchasing power of the middle class and possibility of spending has shifted consumer practises towards services which are focussing on living "the good life" which includes good food, entertainment and luxury items (O'Barr 2008).

An ongoing debate in advertising as well as in most areas of society is the display of nudity, messages of sexual matters and especially women's sexuality. India is known to have strict censorship rules when it comes to media in general, not only in film.

One example is the actions of the Minister of Information and Broadcasting who in 2001 had numerous advertisements taken off the air due to distasteful and degrading representation of women, probably acting on the Indecent Representation of Women Act, enacted in 1986 (Ciochetto 2004:6). Despite the changes in the status of women as consumers, buyers and decision makers among many groupings in India, when it comes to achieving greater independence and gaining more influence it seems that women are still regarded as a group of the population in need of special protection and highly separate from men. This distinction is based on notions of gender norms that depict women as caring, emotional, passive, quiet and shy beings and as such still functions as a highly restricting factor, as expectations of this constructed femininity condemn any behaviour outside the norm. As mentioned above, the discourse results in a creation of an Indian-Western dichotomy, illustrating a view that essentialises characteristics according to locality and distances itself from more complex realities within both sides.

## Challenging gender systems

The norms directing the ways gender supposedly functions are depicted in stereotypes and constructions of femininity and masculinity. The characteristics of what constitutes a woman reflect the norms and values of Indian society.

A woman is labelled a good woman or a bad woman accordingly and is often expected to live by these certain markers by incorporating them into her daily life and behaviour. As a consequence girls and women - in the extreme case - are expected to be obedient, never talk back, dress respectably, not socialise in bars or night clubs, be coy and stay in the family house. As a result women's mobility and choice of life is often seen to be highly constrained (Munshi 2001:7)

The attempt to protect a woman's dignity, which is ultimately connected to the family's honour, often poses severe restriction on her mobility and freedom of choice and can be said to be more devastating to a woman's well-being than any hypothetical danger. Advertising which reinforces gender stereotypes complicates any possible change towards equality and continuously restricts women in their behaviour of what they themselves believe they should do or how they should behave as women. From this traditional gender roles grow and are then again depicted throughout advertising (Ciochetto 2004:10).

In the process of changing purchasing behaviour and encourage specific buys, the tradition of what products are purchased shifts. With women gaining more influence and more consumer-power their role in product choices increases. As a result of changing certain areas of daily life other areas are in the process of being challenged as well, such as traditional values. That means that by creating desires for new products consumers are introduced into a circle of change that influences other aspects of life. Simultaneously, the corporate companies gain from women's increased decision making and purchasing power and thus initiate and stimulate social change through their advertising. An "equation of liberation with product purchasing" can be said to take place and the products and services sold are given extra meaning through the power of catalysing change and shifting structures (Ciochetto 2004:9; Mazzarella 2003:21).

An example in which the woman's role is not merely as a dependant on the household head but in charge of family welfare, can be seen in the ads for *active*, a carrot juice (see picture 22). Even though one can interpret the message in more stereotypical terms, i.e. the women's role as the caretaker of family health, the text here also indicates that the woman is in charge of both the purchase and influencing her husband towards a healthier life, which defies the notion of the husband making all decisions in the household. This illustrates the creation of "the new Indian woman" who is both traditional and modern at the same time (Schneider 2007:822; Fernandes 2000:616+623).

Picture 22:

October 2008, ad for active carrot juice, Defence Colony market, New Delhi.



The following pictures (see pictures 23, 24) illustrate several examples of challenging perceptions of the good girl and femininity. The ad for Hero Hondo depicts a girl, dressed in modern clothes, on a scooter with the text: "Why should boys have all the fun". Here her mobility is in question and is directly counterposed to boys, who apparently automatically are allowed fun, whereas girls usually do not engage in activities that are, firstly outside the house and secondly, only designed for pleasure.

**Picture 23: December 2008, ad for Hero Honda, Varanasi.  
 (“Why should boys have all the fun?”)**



Similarly, the ad for sanitary pads addresses women menstruating and exclaims:

“Don’t Worry. You can do what you want to!” and thereby declares that women are able to make their own choices.

**Picture 24: October 2008, ad for Mankind sanitary pads, Green Park market, New Delhi. (“Don’t worry. You can do, what you want to!”)**





The *Sunsilk* campaign of 2007 goes as far as incorporating the internet where young women are encouraged to share their experiences in life online by inviting to join the gang on a website [www.gangofgirls.com](http://www.gangofgirls.com) (see pictures 25, 26).

**Picture 25: 2007, ad for Sunsilk, India. (“11174 gangs started”)**



Picture 25 shows a wide range of female characters and already here widens the possibility of how to express yourself. Picture 26 goes a step further with a provocative statement inspiring thoughts on defying monogamy. This is surely highly controversial as talks on women sexuality are often treated as a taboo. Virginity as the prime ambition of a young woman stands contested.

**Picture 26: 2007, ad for Sunsilk, India.**



The anonymity given by the internet is a useful way of voicing concerns, sharing stories and asking questions without fearing consequences. Even though the point was to sell hair products this campaign initiated a forum that in the end was utilised as a tool for women to find a voice and express themselves (O`Barr 2008). The opportunity for women to discuss

their lives with other women can be seen as an empowering tool. Family settings can become closed environments, with restricted contact to the outside world, such a forum can allow women to realise they are not alone in their worries and in turn express themselves more freely. Examples of inter-mediality i.e. connecting different types of media, are increasing and can be seen as a strategy to extend media communication. Ads for mail today is in this sense not only selling prescriptions to a magazine but also making yet another media platform available to the consumer. Consequently, the audience will be exposed to even more ads, information and mediated messages.

Other ads have gone as far as challenging notions of heteronormativity and contribute to the discussion of expression of sexuality. The campaign launched by Lee jeans created a furore as the jeans are straight, but the people wearing them might actually not be (see pictures 27, 28). As homosexuality still provokes some part of the population and the process of recent legalisation of the same is only at its beginning, this campaign is an extraordinary example of challenging the existing view on relationships and sexualities. The possibility that the campaign was designed particularly due to its chock effect stands contested by the Lee Business Head Chakor Jain who says: “We believe that people can make their own choices and do whatever they want to do. I don't think we are promoting anything here - we don't condemn it, we don't condone” (Sharma 2009).

**Picture 27, 28: May 2007, ad for Lee Jeans, Bangalore.**





### Concluding Remarks

In the end, the possibility of determining what the ultimate effect of advertising and media is and just how it affects the audience and thus society is a difficult task.

As a mediator between a created reality of consumerism and day-to-day India, explicitly mirroring society and at the same time attempting to influence decisions, the existing communication is an ongoing blur of interaction. What remains is “an uneasy and unstable alliance” (Mazzarella 2003:56). Even though the market place can be said to be the ideal place to negotiate existing values and behaviour due to its communicative practises (Mazzarella 2003:13), the long term effect of media messages, its communication and potential to challenge existing oppressive systems is difficult to predict (Reddi 1989:409). Society existing in a constant state of flux and change is a complex blend of a multitude of individuals and communities where cultures have transgressed local boundaries and as such a difficult mass to predict.

Ultimately, corporate social responsibility that has increased within the last decade (Maignan & Ferrell 2004) can prove to be an important factor when it comes to encouraging social and cultural fundamentals viewed as oppressive or devastating in that their goal to sell products and influence purchasing behaviour is complimented with a willingness to address social faults (Mazzarella 2003:35). Consequently, it would be necessary for both corporate companies and advertising agencies to recognise their responsibility in the spirit of Leo Burnett, one of the advertising agencies in the US (Das 2007:752) and make “decisions that stimulate equality, liberty and fairness of opportunity” (Maignan & Ferrell 2004:4).

We are left with more questions: What is the motivation and objective of using messages that seemingly contradict mainstream attitudes of femininity? Are corporate companies encouraging campaigns that potentially can stir conflict and possibly change? Or are advertising agencies active bodies seeking provocation? What campaigns have shown to be successful and why? And in that sense, in what way does the audience react to these messages and what is the actual impact?

I end here by encouraging more examination of the current trend in advertising. I wonder if consumerism in itself merely sells one kind of the good life or if it is possible to get one free.

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## **The Author**

**Mette Gabler**, born 1977, concluded her studies of Indology from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark in January 2007. During the time of her studies she had been on a year-long research stay in Varanasi, India alongside visiting a Hindi course for non-Hindi speakers at the Banaras Hindu University. This was followed by a stay in Berlin in connection with the Erasmus exchange program at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany from October 2005 to September 2006. Her research here was focused on representation of homosexuality in Indian media, in particular in Indian film. She recently finished her Master of Science degree at Lund University, Sweden in the field of International Development & Management as is now a PhD Candidate at “Querschnittsbereich Medialität und Intermedialität in den Gesellschaften Asiens und Afrikas” at Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.

**Email:** mettegabler@hotmail.com

## **Die Autorin**

**Mette Gabler**, geboren in 1977, schloss Januar 2007 ihren Bachelorstudiengang der Indologie an der Universität Kopenhagen ab. Während dieser Zeit, besuchte sie parallel zu einem einjährigen Forschungsaufenthalt in Varanasi in Indien einen Hindisprachkurs an der Banaras Hindu University. Darauf folgte ein Erasmus-Aufenthalt im Fachbereich Südasiens von Oktober 2005 bis September 2006 an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. Der Forschungsschwerpunkt hierbei war „Queere Lebenskonzepte in den indischen Medien“, insbesondere im Indischen Film. Kürzlich schloss sie ihren Masterstudiengang an der Lund University, Schweden im Fach International Development & Management ab und ist nun Doktorandin des Querschnittsbereichs „Medialität und Intermedialität in den Gesellschaften Asiens und Afrikas“ am Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin.

**Email:** mettegabler@hotmail.com