Girl Power Through Purchasing? 
The Urban, Young, Educated, Working, Indian Woman and Aspirational Images in Personal Care and Beauty Aid Advertisements

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Abstract
This article explores the changing aspirations, economic positions, and social concepts of urban, young, educated, working women in India. This exploration focuses on how these Indian women are imagined and re-imagined in advertisements for personal care and beauty aid products, specifically those for Lakmé cosmetics. The article is based on the advertisements for Lakmé cosmetics, an Indian cosmetics brand, from the fall 2008 through the summer 2009 and six months of fieldwork in 2009. The conclusions drawn in this article are based on the broader context of the Indian economy, consumerism, and representation of women in the media. Furthermore, by focusing on the beliefs and experience of the female advertisers who helped to create Lakmé's advertisements, the article seeks to understand how working Indian women perceive themselves vis-à-vis these advertising images.

Introduction
Sitting in endless Mumbai traffic, the chief operating officer of an advertising agency cautioned: "Culturally, yes, a large part of Indian advertising is based on the Indian culture... which is diametrically different from the other parts of the world. But, at the base level, the consumer is very similar, at least at the primal level." While he might be correct that regardless of where they live, people tend to want products that better themselves and their lives, India's rapid economic growth and the resulting changes to its consumer and social landscape are creating a nascent worth exploring. This article explores how the advertisements for personal care and beauty aid products, including those for Lakmé cosmetics, tap into the needs and desires of a growing number of Indian, urban, young, educated, working women who are a part of India's rapid economic development and emerging consumer culture. These women are buying into the idea that their own purchasing power can help them achieve independence and control, or at least the illusion of these, through material possessions. Advertisements and advertising images aim at this "consumer group" by re-producing and reprocessing these aspirations of independence, control, and power, within a context of mutually reinforcing social constructs, free-market growth, and increasing media consumption. Within marketing campaigns for Lakmé this is especially evocative because the female advertisers who create these ads also fit the definition of the consumer group to whom the advertisements are targeted and for whom the products are designed: urban, young, educated, working women.

In many ways, advertisements can be viewed as part of an ongoing conversation between society, media, and the desires of individual actors, each building upon the other. By exploring this intersection of economics and media, which both influence and reflect life, and by using the advertisements and advertisers for Lakmé cosmetics as a case study, this article aims to draw attention to the advertising idea and ideal of the modern Indian woman and the women who both help create her and often buy into her idea and ideal.

Field research for this article took place in Delhi and Mumbai, India, from August 2008 to August 2009. Research methods included interviews with advertising agency personnel, designers, copywriters, consumer researchers, account executives, advertising filmmakers, strategic marketing/advertising planners, marketers (for media and brands), product specialists, interns, and models, as well as participant observation and ethnographic study at two "fieldwork sites"—a branding and marketing agency in New Delhi (December 2008 to February 2009) and the Mumbai-based advertising agency that created advertisements for the Indian cosmetics brand Lakmé (February to July 2009). This advertising agency was the Mumbai office of a local Indian agency held by a large global advertising and media umbrella group. This article specifically chronicles the experiences and viewpoints of the women and a few men who worked on the advertising account of the Lakmé brand and its products, Aquashine Lip Color and Lip Duo. Formal interviews were conducted using a standard set of questions along with follow-up or alternative questions based on each respondent's occupation or experience; almost all were audio recorded, and many also included a video and visual component where advertisements were shown and discussed. Informal interviews and follow-up questions regarding day-to-day activities and non-taped conversations took place at offices, between meetings, at photo shoots, in transit on trains or in taxis, in bars or at other social settings (including restaurants and cafés), my residence, the residences of informants, and while walking around malls, bazaars (markets), or city streets.

As part of this ethnographic study, I was a participant observer at advertising brand planning meetings, informal work and brainstorm meetings, and advertisement design discussions, as well as in consumer...
focus groups, photo shoots, beauty salons, and social gatherings. This research was limited by what I was allowed to observe and to question. While most of my informants—a term I use in the absence of another equally understood word for those that informally guide and enlighten the anthropologist—researcher during fieldwork—at the advertising and branding agencies gave me enormous freedom in my participation, observation, and questioning, the clients or owners of the products and brands represented by the agencies were less willing to talk. Thus, this research is devoid of much of the experience of advertising clients—the companies that make the products that are advertised—and is limited in its scope because of this.

India from Independence to Liberalization to Today

India gained independence from Britain in 1947. Almost immediately, India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, adopted closed-market economic policies that valued self-sufficiency, tight government control, and restrictions on imported goods. These policies resulted in slow economic growth, with a growth rate of 3.0 to 3.5 percent per year from 1950 to 1980. It was not until the mid-1980s that India’s economy first began to open up or liberalize through a series of economic reforms originally pushed for by Indian businesses and industrialists. Moreover, it took a full economic crisis in the early 1990s—brought on in part by growing external debt from aid loans by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank—to force the Indian government to turn to more widespread pro-free-market policies. These original economic reforms included the abolition of industrial licensing in most sectors, liberalization of the service sector, and the encouragement of private companies to invest in areas previously under control of the state, such as banking, telecommunications, and air travel.

After these more liberal market policies were put in place, the number of foreign brands and companies entering the Indian market and gaining market share in the country surged. But profitability proved much more complicated than anticipated for many of these early investors and their experiences revealed many of India’s economic shortcomings, such as poor infrastructure and lack of delivery network for goods (freezer trucks, good roads, and retail networks).

Despite this, Indian consumers, especially in urban areas, were enthusiastic about entering into the new consumer economy. Thus, the market volume growth rate for many products, such as cars and shampoos, was 20 to 30 percent during the first five years of market liberalization. Furthermore, India’s economy had an average annual growth rate of more than 7 percent from 1997 to 2007. While in 2007, the economic growth rate was 9 percent, and in 2008 it was 6.6 percent, despite the cooling global economy brought on by a global financial crisis. Young Indians, who drive much of this growth, are part of a developing “consumer class.” This consumer class consists of those who are in a position to take advantage of a growing consumer market and who have purchasing power within the economy, even though they are not part of the wealthiest 10 percent of the population. Accordingly, this new consumer class is made up of approximately 375 million Indians “who account for the bulk of branded consumer good purchases,” and for a little more than 30 percent of the national income, according to Bijapurkar, who discusses issues of consumer classification.

The influence of the consumer class can be seen in many aspects of India’s economic growth: from increased product availability and willingness to spend, to a growth in the number of retail spaces such as malls, the first of which opened in Mumbai in 1999. Currently, Indians are buying more than ever before; in 2005, private spending hit 17 trillion rupees ($372 billion USD) and has continued to rise. The average disposable income in India has grown steadily from 1985 to 2005, despite the fact that there are 700 million Indians living on $2 dollars or less per day.

Liberated Economy, Liberated Women?

Historically, highly educated women in India were less likely to work, but the idea of the more independent, free-thinking, and working Indian woman has been germinating since economic liberalization. Furthermore, since liberalization, marketing ideas and attitudes toward this group have changed. While the “new Indian women” used to be “constituted through narrative of home and family that required a negotiation and balance between the new ‘modern’ woman and the old ‘traditional’ one,” how these women are thought of and portrayed has now become less traditional and more subversive. This shift mirrors India’s own economic growth and the corresponding increased opportunities for and ambition of women in the workplace. This can be seen through the fact that the proportion of women employed in the workforce has increased since economic liberalization. In this way the advertising idea of the independent and “modern” Indian woman is not seen as a new one; “this image of the confident, assertive new woman appeared on...
billboards, television advertisements, and magazine covers through the 1990s. But her more recent growth and portrayal through the next 20 years further reflect her independence and continuing process of unnectioning from the home.

More recently, discussions have centered on the fact that 11 percent of the CEOs in India's largest companies are women, while comparatively only 3 percent of the largest U.S. companies have female CEOs. Furthermore, currently 95 percent of women who graduate with a bachelor's degree in India aspire to hold a top job, and 5.5 million educated women enter the Indian workforce each year. Thus, 20 years after India's economic liberalization, urban, young, educated, working, women who are part of the first generation to never experience the old restrictive economic structure, are entering the workplace, making money, and spending it. This young generation grew up with television images of far-off parts of the world, unparalleled economic growth, more consumer choices and job opportunities than their grandparents could ever have imagined, and a desire to become a part of this new material culture. The idea of this "new urban, educated, career woman" as constructed by the media, commercialism, and the national psyche, allows all women to aspire to or literally buy into the idea of "having evolved and arrived...as well as being intrinsically 'modern' and 'liberated'", regardless of whether or not they actually are young, urban, educated, and working. In this way, any good advertisement will attempt to make women want to be part of this clique, or ideal, by helping women achieve at least the appearance or feeling of belonging to this growing and seemingly joinable group.

The Lakmé Advertising Team

The Lakmé cosmetics advertising team at the agency office in Mumbai was anchored by Amrita, an account director, and Tara, an account manager. They had been with the Lakmé advertising account the longest and were responsible for much of the recent product success that Lakmé was experiencing; they were also acknowledged to have the best relationship with the client. Two other women assisted Amrita and Tara: Pia and Neeta. Pia was responsible for much of the account's day-to-day work, took the time to get the small details of presentations to the client correct, and was considered one of the more serious workers on the account. Neeta, an account management trainee, was the most junior member of the Lakmé team and the newest to the advertising business—she was the most excited about her work and about living in Mumbai, having moved there from a smaller city in Punjab. This core team was assisted by two strategic planners, Anuva and Renu, who worked across accounts by researching consumer trends and helping to focus brand strategy, as well as Anjali, an account planner. The designers, filmmakers, and artists who created the Lakmé ads also worked across accounts, but Faria, an art director, was the main designer for many of the Lakmé print advertisements.

Several of these women had studied or worked abroad before returning to work in India, or were looking into opportunities to work abroad in the future. Many of them were from Mumbai, but some also came from Punjab, West Bengal, and Kerala. While the core Lakmé team was all women, on the whole, the advertising agency was mostly men, which reflected the greater numbers of working men in India and the historically male dominance of advertising agencies. But the fact that the Lakmé team was mostly women was something much of the advertising agency staff and many of the team members thought appropriate, considering that they worked on a cosmetics brand. This attitude is not that different from how advertising was thought about and evolved within the U.S., where many agencies initially employed women to specifically or only work on advertisements aimed at female consumers because of the idea that these products needed a "woman's touch" in their ads. A much cited example of this is the J. Walter Thompson Women's Editorial Department.

Lakmé: the History, the Brand

The Lakmé brand was India's first major cosmetics brand and because its history mirrors the growth of India's economy, the personal care and beauty aid product market, and the ways that Indian women themselves have changed, its brand positioning has evolved or changed considerably over time. The Lakmé cosmetics brand entered the Indian market more than 50 years ago with color cosmetics and is considered an iconic Indian brand because of its long history in the country. When Lakmé was first introduced, its primary advertising and marketing objective was to dispel the idea that only loose and immoral women wore makeup, as well as simply to teach the average Indian woman how to apply makeup. Lakmé's product and brand communication also positioned makeup as a way for women to be noticed by men. This type of advertisement storyline highlighted the idea that a woman is part of a man's life, and that by wearing Lakmé products a woman is pleasing her man, and through his pleasure, pleasing herself. For these ads, "getting noticed in a man's world" was the key brand image and concept.

Post-liberalization, in the face of a shrinking market share and increased competition from foreign cosmetics and skincare brands, Lakmé had to redefine itself. Thus, Lakmé's communication began to emphasize the brand's position as an Indian brand with the ability to understand the uniqueness of the Indian woman. By the early 2000s, Lakmé shifted its brand image and communications platform from "getting noticed in a man's world" to "making a mark in all spheres of her life." This new positioning was meant to reflect the idea that Lakmé products were for women to better themselves for themselves, which reflects many of the current advertising team's views that the Lakmé women is someone who "can stand strong".

Currently, the Lakmé catalog of products consists of the following: Lakmé's regular cosmetic collection, its master brand; a pricier, higher-quality line of long-lasting makeup called Lakmé 9-to-5, which is trying to compete with higher-priced aspiring brands, such as Revlon and L'Oreal; a teen-oriented makeup line
called Elle 18; Lakmé Beauty Salons, which are full-service beauty parlors that use and promote Lakmé products; and a line of skincare products. The advertising agency and women discussed here worked on Lakmé Beauty Salons and the cosmetics products of the brand—lipstick, nail color, eye makeup, blush, etc.—not the skincare products. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) makes all of the Lakmé products under the Lakmé brand, which advertises as appealing to a core consumer with the following characteristics: creative, original, a mix of Indian and Western, inspiring, a contemporary Indian beauty, going places or well traveled, sensual, alive and expressive, urban, sophisticated, and real. Lakmé’s communication aims to portray the brand as not high maintenance or self-conscious, not looking for male appreciation or approval, and not cutey, pretentious, overtly sexy, a manipulator, or fake. The brand aims to be “massstige”—sold for the masses, the consumer class, while still being a prestigious item to own and to use.

Lakmé’s own growth and the growth of its competition can be seen in the expanding market for personal care and beauty aid products in India. For example, in 2008, the Indian market for personal care and beauty aid products was approximately $5.7 billion and is expected to pass the $50 billion mark by 2025; by comparison, the U.S. personal care and beauty aid market is currently worth approximately $56 billion. Furthermore, in terms of the changing social value of beauty and the growth of the beauty industry in India, many women said personal grooming had always been important and there was always a social value or currency to being beautiful—however defined—in India. But they added that, within the last few years, more women in India believe and recognize that anyone can make themselves beautiful through grooming or enhancing one’s assets, as well as acknowledging that there is more societal pressure to be well groomed. Account director Tara pointed out that:

Frankly speaking, now everyone thinks they can be good looking and beautiful and they will work towards it. And this is a shift... [In India in particular, it used to be that if you weren’t not good looking, if you were not fair, you were branded as ugly and you always went through being a victim... but now even in films there are very average-looking females who are making their mark here and they look good because of their grooming, so this shift has come about.

The growth in the personal care and beauty industry partly explains this perceived change in the attainability of beauty, promoted at least in part by the personal care and beauty aid industry itself. Yet, this can also be attributed to a growing sense of individual needs and desires especially for urban, young, educated, working women who are living on their own or trying to get ahead at work and enjoy life. As Lois W. Banner points out in her own assessment of the history and growth of the beauty industry in the U.S., “the increased sophistication of businessman and advertisers in targeting specific consumer populations alone cannot explain the continuing democratization of beauty”. Regardless, beauty is big business in India, and the personal care and beauty aid market, including Lakmé products, is one of the many growing areas of the Indian economy.

More recently, to break away from the rest of the increasingly cluttered market, all Lakmé advertisements have to portray the Lakmé women in a specific way by adhering to three principles. Armita explained that the first rule is that the model in the advertisement must look contemporary. The second is that she must be expressive and creative, and she does not copy other things or people, which is an extension of the idea that Lakmé, as a brand, and Lakmé women do not copy Euro-American Western culture and trends but instead tweak them and make them Indian. And third is that Indian women are unique and have a unique sensibility, meaning that the Lakmé woman in each advertisement must be portrayed in a sensual, beautiful, and unique way that does not imitate other glamour-beauty brands.

Discussion: Lakmé and Modern Girl Power

The women who were my informants at the advertising agency in India were very cognizant of both their current positions as Indian women and the positions that their mothers and grandmothers were able to hold. They were also very aware of the benefits of working and being able to support themselves. Renu, a strategic planner, explained, “My mom was not expected to work but expected to marry, but I am expected to work”. While Pia, a senior account executive, put it this way, “I am very proud that I am working today so that I can support my family. You’re not dependent on your parents. I want to stay independent, so I would work after marriage, and I don’t want to ask my husband for money or be questioned about how I spend money.”

The team members’ ambitions regarding work, their level of education, and the urban setting made them keenly aware of their position as both the advertiser and the target audience for many products. Pia explained, “If I see a TVS scooty [motorbike] or Pepsi ad, I identify that this is my age or my generation that they are talking about, so you know that they are talking to my generation”. In this way, many of these female advertisers were excited that they were the focus of the advertisements, being represented in the media, and being talked to or courted to buy products. They liked the idea that they were a part of a new movement of new Indian women who worked, had their own money, and were independent, but they were also painfully aware of how this image was also constructed in the media and by advertisers such as themselves. Armita explained that, “we [advertisers] really work closely with consumers, to understand what women need today, and therefore we are involved at the stage of developing a product for them which is very suitable for Indian skin and their needs, as in Indian woman’s needs, then we come up with a communication which would appeal to them and inspire them”.

When discussing India’s economic growth and the increase in product and brand availability, many of my female informants at the advertising agency pointed to a changing cultural attitude in which Indians,
including themselves, were moving away from a Gandhian austerity, regardless of one's material wealth, to a desire to "live my life well." The advertising account director for the Lakmé cosmetics brand, Amrita, explained:

> I would say that India has really changed these past five years... There is an entire media explosion which is going on, new media channels, magazines, you get to know more about what is going on worldwide... And this entire kind of boom, which has opened up opportunities in India... And also the acceptance that I am making money, I should live my life well, getting into this credit-card and spending-by-plastic culture, that has slowly started developing.\textsuperscript{\textastertildaxlvii}

Sapna, an advertising art group head who worked across accounts, explained it this way, "The younger generation just wants to live it up, so they go in for these big, big buys, but the older generation, my parents, they will still think 500 times before getting something like a Sony Bravia TV. They gauge everything and think a lot, but the younger generation is more instinctive... If they like it, they go for it."\textsuperscript{\textastertildaxlviii} This reflects, not only the greater availability of products, goods, and lines of credit, but also the trend that many Indians believe that "India is rising," becoming powerful and important globally. Anuva, an advertising agency strategic planner for Lakmé, mused, "The temperament of the nation is very forward...and we are becoming less shy as people and more boisterous, a representation of this would be the Jaguar takeover by [Indian automaker] Tata.\textsuperscript{\textastertildaxlix}

Notwithstanding the historical shifts in the advertising images of women that have taken place since liberalization, many young, urban, educated, working women at the advertising agency who described themselves as modern and independent expressed frustration with what they deemed a lack of change in how women were presented in the media and treated in everyday life. Many also expressed concerns that portrayals of women in the media were actually regressing, becoming more traditional and chauvinist, and not changing fast enough. In explaining how she approached the advertisements she helped to create, Amrita explained that she thought most ads, "show woman as either a mother taking care of kids, protecting her family, taking care of her husband's food, or washing clothes, washing utensils... 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Ads should ideally do that [change behavior], but unfortunately ads have been reduced to entertainment because advertising has stopped being in the business of persuasion, and now we are in the business of entertainment, and that is one of my problems with the industry because we have easily taken the blame off our shoulders, you know, now we say I have made a cool ad that is good enough.\textsuperscript{xli}

In general, the Lakmé advertising team felt that this also showed a lack of creativity because so many effective ads simply used some defining element of Indian pop culture, such as Bollywood or cricket, or both, regardless of the product, even through this type of ad felt both uninventive and backwards-looking to the Lakmé team:

Bollywood is obviously like a religion in India, like cricket, and these and advertising are interlinked—the minute you associate Bollywood with an advertisement [or product] it's already a seller; you just need a big star to endorse something... You have Shahrukh Khan or Amitabh Bachchan who can sell any product on the planet in India... And there are ads influenced by Bollywood plots... Any film star with a product, or a cricketer with a product, it's sold in terms of association.\textsuperscript{xlii}

While the advertising team was often disappointed with the work of their colleagues, when discussing the ads they created for the Lakmé cosmetics brand the team was adamant about the importance of the brand for both promoting a positive image of Indian women and the inventiveness of the storylines and tropes the ads used to showcase the ideal Lakmé women and the product. Amrita explained that:

You know the Lakmé woman is a woman like us, like a Neeta, or a Pia or a me. We are Indians at heart, and at the end of the day we have been born and brought up with Indian cultures and traditions, however, we are not scared to express ourselves when the time comes, and we don't... [W]e are not afraid to wear a kajol to work or an eye-liner to work and it's not necessary that I have to prove my Indian-ness so I will not wear a sari or a sawal kameez to work every day, I mean I can wear anything, right from [sic] a denim shorts to a bikini, I mean I cannot wear a sawal kameez and go to the beach. It's as simple as that, so that's the meaning of contemporaneity.\textsuperscript{xlii}

Many of the women felt that Lakmé was both an iconic Indian cosmetics brand and a sort of pseudo-feminist project that would enable them to create and depict modern representations of an Indian woman while still doing their job as advertisers. Pia explained, "When I came to be knowing that I would be working on Lakmé, it was definitely exciting because it was cosmetics and the relationship between a girl and a cosmetic brand... It is very natural."\textsuperscript{xliii} Amrita also explained that the team of Lakmé advertisers was creating advertisements so that, "the way the Lakmé woman is portrayed now, she is not seeking admiration from anyone or affirmation from men; she has her own head where she can stand strong."\textsuperscript{xliv} Thus, these advertising women and the Lakmé woman whose image they create are akin to the idea of the "Modern Girl"\textsuperscript{xlv} or the "working girl" of the 1920s, whom was both a "fashion trendsetter" and an purveyor of the "autonomy" women could have when they have and spend their own money.\textsuperscript{xlvi}

**Lakmé Fashion Week and Bridal Sutra**

One of my early, firsthand experiences with Lakmé's advertising and communication strategy was during the Summer 2009 Lakmé Fashion Week (LFW). Lakmé Fashion Week is a twice-yearly major fashion show in India for Indian fashion designers to show off their designs, sponsored by Lakmé. It is one of...
Lakmé's major communication properties through which the brand reaffirms its identity and repositions itself with its core consumer group—women in their 20s and 30s—as a relevant beauty aid that is fashionable, glamorous, and appealing. LFW, which began in 2000, represents Lakmé's creative side and reaffirms its position as an aspirational and glamorous brand. The Summer 2009 Lakmé Fashion Week event took place at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in the posh Mumbai suburb of Santacruz. The weeklong event featured runway presentations by many top Indian designers and clothing chains, along with momentous catwalk and audience appearances by major Bollywood film stars and famous Indian models. After passing through the hotel's security, there was an area for press interviews and a Lakmé Beauty Salon, which had been set up to support the brand.

Following members of the Lakmé advertising team through the event, I was struck by how it looked like a runway event in any part of the world, with the exception of saris appearing so often on the runway. The major event for Lakmé and of LFW is the last runway show which, since 2004, has paired a famous designer's clothing with the Lakmé cosmetics promoted in that season's Lakmé ad campaign. The runway models in the closing show wear the designer's collection along with Lakmé makeup, and the three Lakmé models—the three fashion models who are contracted by Lakmé to appear in all of their print, TV, and other advertising events—walked the catwalk as part of the finale. The Summer 2009 finale featured fashion designs by Anamika Khanna and Lakmé cosmetics from its Summer 2009 "Bridal Sutra" campaign.

The LFW Bridal Sutra theme—the art of being a bride—was repeated from winter 2008 through summer 2009. The ads and cosmetic products associated with Lakmé's Winter 2008 campaign and Winter 2008 LFW used the Bridal Sutra theme did very well; hoping to build on their previous success, Lakmé and HUL wanted to extend the same theme to Summer 2009. The winter 2008 "looks" and advertisements showed the Lakmé models wearing makeup in rich, deep, earthy colors and clothing that depicted the stages and ceremonies of an Indian wedding with modern edgy touches. For example, one of the print ads depicted the bride with a watch on her wrist, a modern adornment, while another showed a bride in a black and red dress, a nontraditional wedding color combination (see Figure 1). According to many of the people involved in the making of the ad campaign, the images aimed to be a combination of the traditional with flashes of nontraditional modernism and Western-international touches. The advertising campaign also took advantage of the fact that LFW Winter 2008 came right before Indian wedding season.

By picking up where the success of the Winter 2008 cosmetics collection and ad campaign had left off, the Summer 2009 Bridal Sutra collection and ad campaign were able to build on a theme already familiar to consumers, but there was a lot of concern that the theme limited Lakmé to a cosmetics brand concerned only with weddings, when in reality Lakmé cosmetics were for everyday and any occasion. To counter this concern, the advertising team created advertising images for the Summer 2009 campaign about the emotional journey of a bride as opposed to a ceremonial one. This concept made the images more ambiguous and less wedding specific; the models were not necessarily bridal-looking, although they were clearly Indian (see Figures 2 and 3). Thus, when describing the print and out-of-home or billboard visuals of the Summer 2009 campaign, the advertising team used the phrases, "joy of life," "feelings of connectedness to family," "true authenticity," and "potent femininity and confidence in marriage." The word "marriage" is only mentioned once in these descriptions, and no actual marriage is seen taking place within the images. Instead, the model, in beautiful makeup and elegant dress, is the fixture.
The Summer 2009 campaign images showed the models wearing light-toned makeup and dressed in traditional flowing fabrics. These advertisements showcased the dichotomy of modernity and tradition—of the Indian woman who is modern in her makeup and personal fashion choices, but who is also still traditional in her adherence to traditional Indian dress for marriage or other special occasions. These ads conform to what Rupal Oza explained as "modern but not so modern as to transgress into 'Westernization' modernity. Furthermore, this resolution of tradition/modernity, old/new, and Indian/Western in the identity of the new Indian woman was also an attempt at reconstituting globalizing national identity". Thus, the identity of the Indian woman is made explicitly separate from the idea of the global or Western woman in these images, unlike the TV spots for Aquashine Lip Color and Lip Duo explored later in this article. The Bridal Sutra ads are more firmly rooted in traditional female roles, in both the wedding theme and the Indian-ness of the clothing and image background. These traditional elements make the Bridal Sutra ads less rebellious than their lack of overt marriage tropes and modern touches would lead one to believe. Thus, although the women in these advertisements appear to have their own voice, for example in their posture, heels, and jewelry choices, this voice appears to be contextually limited to India, while the later TV spots feature characters who appear both more progressive and in a more global context.

On the other hand, many of the women on the Lakmé advertising team were quick to express their admiration for the Lakmé brand and the positive images of women they felt it presented. Although this could be attributed to the fact that it was the brand they worked on, I think it was also because the advertisements were positive and helped reinforce the idea that there had been progress in the position of Indian women in the workforce and in their own social and financial independence. Neeta, the youngest and newest person working on the Lakmé account, explained that Lakmé represented "feminine energy...it has nothing to do with a guy, and the woman is portrayed as the best she could be." Having worked on the brand for a much longer period of time, Tara also explained that, "I love Lakmé because...it's not about cause and effect, it is a way of living, it's about life, celebrating life and enjoying every moment of life. That's what we all want to do, and in some way that's why I relate to it, and that's why it is
The Lakmé team genuinely seemed to like the brand and many of its products, but they were also well aware of the many issues the brand faced, especially as it tried to compete with foreign brands that were newer to the market.

Conversely, many of the advertisers realized that the fact that Lakmé is often described as "an iconic brand in India... it's a huge brand, you go to any of the small cities in India and the women only talk about Lakmé". This observation was seen as both a positive and a negative by the agency and HUL. While every woman in India knows Lakmé, everyone does not think Lakmé is a good brand when compared to foreign brands that are new, exotic, and may be seen as better made. Since liberalization, Lakmé, which up to that point was essentially the only Indian cosmetics brand, has had to find ways to compete with more and more international brands and appeal to younger Indian women who often associate Lakmé with their mothers and the "old India." To do this, the Lakmé team often focused on the unique place of Lakmé in India as a positive quality. Pia pointed out the positive in that, "Lakmé is very proud of saying that we come up with shades and cosmetics that will suit Indian skin tone, especially because Indian women feel that L'Oreal, Revlon, Maybelline—they are international brands, how will they know what will suit me as an Indian? So that way, we have one 'plus point' in being an Indian brand." By trying to focus on the positive Indian aspect of the brand as indicative of the brand's understanding of Indian women, the advertising team attempted to modernize the brand and attract a broader youth market to its products. Many of the brands TV spots were in part trying to do this.

**Lakmé Aquashine: The Lipstick of the Future**

This goal of reaching more young, working women is especially apparent in the TV spot advertisement for Lakmé Aquashine Lip Color, a lipstick-like product that reflected the struggle of the global and the Indian while being Lakmé's most successful product and most expensive before Lip Duo Lip Color, which cost 395 Rupees ($9 USD). Aquashine was not only a very successful product for Lakmé but was also one of the first successes for the Lakmé advertising team. The team tended to attribute much of the product's success to the fact that it was now more acceptable and encouraged, through mass media, for women to take what they have and enhance it through "beauty tools." But the advertisement was also evocative while still classic in its presentation of a problem solved by the product.

The TV ad spot for Aquashine Lip Color shows a woman—played by Lakmé model Indrani Dasgupta—dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and red high heels, who looks at a blank wall and then opens different lip color products: first lipstick, then lip-gloss, and finally lip balm. After appearing to use each product on the wall, like paint, she throws it over her shoulder. Then she steps back to reveal that she painted the word, "change." At the same time, the voiceover chimes in, "Change to the lipstick of the future"; the ad then describes the product and how to use it before ending with a voiceover, "Lakmé Aquashine Lip Color, the lipstick of the future is here."
Pia described the distinctiveness and positive nature of the ad and product by explaining, “So what we wanted to try to tell women is, to change, that’s why you see a woman writing on the wall as graffiti. She is not a rebel, I would say, but takes her own stand in her life”. The TV spot and the product reintroduced Lakmé as innovative, fun, and competitive with other international brands because of its whimsical nature and the aspirational relatability of the women in the ad. Amrita, who was credited with helping to create the ad spot, liked the ad’s naturalness, and that it was easy to relate to the character, “This [Aquashine ad]… [i]t’s such a brilliant idea…. [R]ather than just chucking things off, you are using them to express. It is a very good idea yet it comes very naturally and we would also want to do it…or we would not mind doing it someday. It’s not unbelievable and yet it’s very warm and approachable, and friendly”. Furthermore, what is so striking about the ad is that it ties together Indian and cosmopolitanism as a desirable future. “The lipstick of the future” is a combination of products (not originally Indian) reconfigured by an Indian brand for the “modern” Indian woman who, like the woman in the ad, is willing to put red streaks of color in her hair and wear western clothing while still looking Indian and using Indian-made goods. She is not afraid of and is very willing to change to meet the new future of India. The lipstick of the future represents the Indian of the future, and the future looks creative, colorful, and very global while still clearly Indian. Thus, the Lakmé Aquashine TV advertising spot and the product are Indian but draw upon Western makeup types and imagery, while also promoting the image of an independently minded woman who is not afraid to say—or write—what she thinks, something easy for urban, young, educated, working women to relate to. Their ambitions, and the value they place on the freedom to work and do what they desire, make the Lakmé Aquashine character a perfect representation to emulate by buying the product.

This reflects the idea that female consumers can fulfill longings or desires with the help of products. Jennifer Scanlon explains these “inarticulate longings” as “longings which could be met through consumerism”. Although for Scanlon, these longings filled by products take on a negative connotation as she questions the fulfillment products could bring the consumer or buyer, she seems to ignore that products can enable one to do certain things or try something different. This is what the Lakmé Aquashine advertisement is drawing upon—the idea that a product can offer transformation and access to new experiences. Thus, in the Lakmé Aquashine advertisements, the idea of change is also indicative of a larger idea that certain products and the consumption of those products can alter one’s appearance, thereby enabling the buyer and user of the product to reinvent or display a different type of self. Here, a lip color, like any personal care and beauty aid product, can “literally change how bodies appear”. This is an idea explored by Weinbaum et al. in their discussion of the “Modern Girl” in global imagery, including advertisements, in the 1920s and ‘30s. The idea promoted by Aquashine Lip Color, like some of the imagery explored by Weinbaum et al. is “outfitting them [women] with faces and bodies that embodied them to cross the domestic threshold into the public sphere”. Although the Lakmé Aquashine advertisement is much more recent, it still promotes using something that alters one’s appearance, to embolden and to be ready for the future or the outside world of work and fun.

Lakmé Lip Duo: Going Global with Long-Lasting Lip Color

The success of Aquashine Lip Color embodied Lakmé to launch a more expensive and premium lipstick-like product, Lip Duo from Lakmé 9-to-5. 9-to-5 is Lakmé’s long-lasting line of makeup, which by design must conform to the brand’s core consumer traits in marketing while setting itself apart from the master brand to appeal to a slightly more upscale consumer. Lakmé 9-to-5’s higher price point means that a 9-to-5 powder compact costs 395 Rupees ($9 USD), while a less premium Lakmé powder compact will cost 100 Rupees ($2.25 USD). This is still less expensive than many of the international brands 9-to-5 lists as competitors, which may charge approximately 600 Rupees ($13.50 USD) for a compact. The fact that 9-to-5 is long-lasting makeup is clearly invoked in its name, which comes from the idea that this makeup will last from 9 o’clock to 5 o’clock, invoking the idea of a career women. But the Lakmé team was quick to point out that this long-lasting quality can be equally useful for any woman.

Amrita, who was in charge of the advertisings for 9-to-5, explained the sub-brand came about when Lakmé, “launched a long-wear lipstick, and it did well, so we thought why not create a whole range.” She went on to explain that the launch of the 9-to-5 line was, “supported with a print campaign, and women know today that 9-to-5 is a long-wear range from Lakmé, so that task is done,” meaning that women recognize the 9-to-5 line and know what it is, even if they have never used a 9-to-5 product, and the next step is to prove that 9-to-5 is not just a basic range for a high price but that that there is some technology behind its long-lasting ability. To do this, HUL launched Lip Duo, which Pia described as, “your lip color and gloss together in one pack; it is long lasting from the premium range, 9-to-5, so we can claim it will last longer than 12 hours. It comes in 12 shades and uses a ‘colorfix’ formula, which fixes the color on your lips with a moisturizing coat…. It costs 650 Rupees ($14.60 USD), so its price is very
similar to our competitors’ prices. An issue that the Lakmé team had to contend with was that many international brands already had long-lasting cosmetic lines, so they needed to separate Lakmé’s 9-to-5 line and Lip Duo as a product from the rest of the long-lasting makeup in the marketplace. To do this they focused on the fact that even though Lip Duo was not an innovative format in the market, it was an innovative format and product for Lakmé. To sell Lip Duo the team decided to use a communications strategy based on the idea of “spontaneity,” which according to Amrita, “sort of works beautifully because ‘spontaneity’ gives the woman an opportunity to express herself. So that is where it fits in brilliantly with the mother brand.”

Lip Duo entered the market in June 2009 supported by a TV spot. The TV spot follows a day in the life of a busy and professional Indian woman, played again by Lakmé model Indrani Dasgupta (see Video 2 and Figure 5). The most evocative aspect of the advertisement is the background music, which includes lyrics such as, “baby pick it up if you want to keep up with me,” “I am unstoppable,” and “catch me if you can.” The TV spot’s imagery, voiceover, and lyrics all relate to the idea of long lasting, life uninterrupted, and “spontaneity,” especially in the unprompted-looking movements the woman makes while playing with a boa and dancing. The spot also points to the idea that with Lakmé products, and this lip color specifically, one can be unstoppable, confident, successful, and still have fun. In many ways, then, these lyrics and discussion reflect other personal care and beauty aid advertisements, which have traded on the idea of being the best, first, or untouchable. These include the American ads for Clairol hair dye, which used the slogan, “Because I’m Worth It,” and Revlon’s 1973 campaign for Charlie Perfume, which showed confident and fashionable-looking women in suits on their way to take on the world of business.

Thus, while the Lip Duo ad might not be ground breaking in the world of advertising, the TV spot, like the spot for Aquashine, can be seen as oddly empowering to women within the context of India’s economic growth, these women’s aspirations, and increased opportunities. In the Lip Duo TV spot, the woman puts on the makeup as the face she wants to present to the public world and to show her own
work and life ambitions. The TV spot's voiceover, images of a shiny glass office, coffee to go, and ballroom dancing can also be read as an extension of the feelings among India's growing consumer class (young women and men in the urban workforce) that India is growing, modernizing, and rising to challenge other more-developed nations that might one day have to keep up with India. The ads' locations also suggest a global no-man's land, so that the woman could be in Mumbai, Hong Kong, New York, or any other major city, placing the woman and India on the same playing field as those other locations. In this way, this ad is also a further break from tradition and the more traditional look of some other Lakmé ads, such as the Bridal Sutra campaign. This can also be seen in the fact that the woman has a job—as a fashion designer, thereby tying into Lakmé's position in the fashion world—placing her further away from a traditional role as mother, wife, and daughter.

Pia explained that, "for Lip Duo, basically we are saying long lasting... [T]he ad shows a cross section of her life so seamlessly, she just goes from one situation to the other, so we are basically trying to say...that you don't have the time to pause for touch ups...life uninterrupted". The advertising team talked a lot about the idea of "life uninterrupted" in conjunction with the 9-to-5 line and Lip Duo. They liked the idea that makeup is an asset to women and therefore is not something that should make life harder or get in the way of doing other things; it should allow one to be more free, willing, and excited about experiencing life and doing what makes one happy. Thus, in the ad, the consumption of a product enables the buyer to experience more individual freedom and confidence in her career. As Weinbaum et al. point out in their own assessment of earlier advertisements, "Though commodities do not necessarily offer the modern Girl-as-consumer freedom from gendered social constraints or create new social and sexual norms, commodities opened up new possibilities in the realm of self-reflection, self-creation, and self-validation". And perhaps this is all ads can do: enable the consumers to explore other alternative identities and ways of presenting oneself to the public. Although the Lakmé team has high hopes that advertisements can help promote a more cosmopolitan and gender-egalitarian India, at the end of the day, advertisements sell products by claiming that they will make the buyer more confident, prettier, more popular, and better. Since so many urban, young, educated, working women desire to have a successful and impressive career, creating advertisements for products that claim to further that goal is both logical and potentially very effective.

Although the enterprise of examining advertisements as reflections and re-appropriations of the social place of women and mood of a nation is not new, the images and their relationship to those who create them are different. The women who make the Lakmé ads have a stake in their own image appropriation and their own consumption of images, advertisements, and products. Their desire for the Lakmé brand to succeed is tangled up with their own ambition, the ambition of the Indian nation, and with how women are empowered to buy products that claim to empower them.

Conclusion

For the Lakmé ad team, the success with Lip Duo and Aquashine Lip Color showed that Lakmé could successfully compete with the international products now in the Indian market, and perhaps beyond. In describing where she wants to take Lakmé, Amrita said, "You know, in the future, I see Lakmé as a Shiseido. Shiseido is a Japanese brand, yet much of it is being used in the U.S. and U.K.... What we know and what we have studied is that people know that Shiseido is a good premium brand, yet it is very Japanese. So I see Lakmé becoming an Indian brand, but being trusted as good quality and a good brand, which women in the West would not be afraid of". And, this could very possibly happen, as the automaker Tata prepares to launch its Nano car for U.S. and European markets and consumers, the possibility of an Indian cosmetics company doing the same seems more than reasonable.

The fact that Lakmé's ads show strong female characters who appear to be ambitious, in charge of their careers, and independent is significant because they reflect the increasing number of women in college and in the workplace, and those who are gaining leadership positions in India. Nevertheless, the majority of Indian women are still second-class citizens. They are disproportionately represented in the child mortality rate, not to mention the rampant female infanticide in many parts of North India. Yet the new capitalist, economically liberated India offers some women a chance to make their own money and thus have greater power over their lives. And as the consumer class grows, more Indians of both genders are actively and excitedly participating in the consumer economy so that advertisements are latching onto these freedoms, desires, and identities to sell products while disseminating the desires and aspirations of their consumers. This appropriation of desire, ambition, and aspiration reflects how advertisements work to make products appealing, but these aspirations are also reflected in the sociocultural climate and attitudes. An advertising Chief Operating Officer described it this way: "[A]t the core level it is not that the Indian woman's aspirations are any different from a woman somewhere else, but probably the way that you get to [reach] her will be different".

This article raises a number of questions and possible directions for further research. Specifically, more research needs to be done on consumer-class, urban, working women, especially those living in large urban areas such as Delhi and Mumbai. There are gaps in the information regarding their number and marital status as well as their understanding of their economic power. This should be further explored in the context of India's economic development, the possibilities or struggles it creates for women within the workforce, their media representation, and their consumer decisions. In addition, while there have been other studies, such as the work of Rupal Oza, on the conflict of the traditional and modern in images of women in newly liberalized India, these economic growing pains should be further explored both in advertising and other media images of urban women, as well as for other consumer groups. Furthermore, a companion study to this one, from the perspective of urban, young, educated, working women who are...
not in the advertising industry, could provide valuable insights to how these women see or re-imagine themselves vis-à-vis these images. Such studies will enable a better understanding of the size and characteristics of this population, how they see themselves, and how they interpret what is marketed to them. Future studies should also examine the extent to which these young, consumer-class, urban women continue to work after marriage and children. This article only begins to address these questions in the context of the expansion of India's economy and the role of women within it.

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Footnotes
i. Interview with Chief Operating Officer of an advertising agency (Mumbai, India: April 17, 2009).
iv. Ibid., 694-5.
vii. Bijapurkar, 86.
x. Ibid., 31.
xiv. Ibid., 33.
xvi. Ibid., 27.
xvii. Ibid., 33.
xviii. Ibid., 33.
xx. Ibid., 33.
xxi. Ibid., 33.
xxiv. Hewlett.
xxv. Ibid., 27.
xxvi. Ibid., 33.
xxvii. Ibid., 33.
xxix. Ibid., 27.
xxx. Ibid., 33.


xxvi. Interview with Amrita, Account Director for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 20, 2009); Hindustan Unilever Limited.

xxvii. Interview with Amrita.


xxix. Interview with Tara, Account Manager for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 28, 2009).


xxxi. Interview with Amrita.

xxxii. Interview with Renu, Strategic Planner across accounts (Mumbai, India: April 13, 2009).

xxxiii. Interview with Tara, Account Manager for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 28, 2009).

xxxiv. Ibid.

xxxv. Ibid.

xxxvi. Interview with Amrita.

xxxvii. Interview with Amrita.

xxxviii. Interview with Anuva, Strategic Planner for Lakmé and across accounts (Mumbai, India: February 26 and April 28, 2009).

xxxix. Interview with Amrita.

xl. Oza, 33.

xli. Interview with Neeta, Account Management Trainee for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 27, 2009).

xlii. Interview with Tara, Account Manager for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 28, 2009).

xliii. Interview with Amrita.

xliv. Interview with Renu.

xxlv. Interview with Amrita.


xxlviii. Lakmé Bridal Sutra Print Advertisement, Femina, June 4-17, 2009, cover insert; Lakmé Bridal Sutra Print Advertisement, Marie Claire India, May 2009, 14-15.


xli. Interview with Neeta, Account Management Trainee for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 27, 2009).

xlii. Interview with Tara, Account Manager for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 28, 2009).

xliii. Interview with Amrita.

xliv. Interview with Renu.


xlvi. Interview with Renu.

xlvii. Interview with Renu.

xlviii. Interview with Amrita.

xlix. Interview with Amrita.

l. Oza, 32.


lii. Interview with Tara, Account Manager for Lakmé cosmetics (Mumbai, India: May 28, 2009).

liii. Interview with Amrita.

liv. Interview with Renu.


lvii. Interview with Renu.

lviii. Interview with Renu.

lix. Weinbaum et al. (A), 18.

lx. Ibid., 19.

lxii. Interview with Amrita.

lxiii. Ibid.

lxiv. Interview with Renu.

lxv. Interview with Amrita.

lxvi. Interview with Amrita.

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lxxiii. Ibid.

lxxiv. Ibid.

lxxv. Ibid.
lxviii. Sivulka, 300-02.
lxxi. Interview with Amrita.

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