



Cleanups, confidence, and cosmetics: Marketing beauty in India

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Abstract

Since economic liberalization in 1991, India has been experiencing rapid economic growth and a shift to consumer culture, making it fertile ground for marketers of consumer goods. Historically, sales of beauty products in India had been limited by high taxation, restricted consumer choice, and high levels of poverty; post-liberalization, the country was therefore seen as a market with immense, albeit untapped, potential. However, even as beauty industry reports tout the potential for growth, nearly three decades after liberalization, per capita sales of beauty products continue to be some of the lowest in the world. Little is known about why beauty products remain stubbornly resistant to aspirational marketing efforts. Meanwhile, scant social scientific attention has been paid to the creation and marketing of tastes and desires by the beauty industry in India and women's engagement with those desires. In this article, we present ethnographic depth on how local beauty cultures affect understandings of bodily aesthetics to create hybrid beauty practices and on how marketing efforts seek to channel these practices into consumer behavior. We examine some of the major points of contingent difference linked to low volumes of cosmetics sales in India and explore the approaches adopted by advertisers and marketers of beauty products to convert such difference into new imaginaries that foster mass consumption.

Keywords

Beauty work, India, globalization, marketing, consumption, makeup

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After economic liberalization in 1991, India began experiencing rapid economic growth. Post-liberalization, the country was seen as fertile ground for marketers of consumer goods, and this continues to be the case, given India's rising affluence and shift to a market economy. Even though beauty product sales have been historically limited due to restricted consumer choices, high taxation on items considered non-essential, and high levels of poverty, India is now heralded as a vital growth market with immense, and largely untapped, potential (e.g. L'Oréal, 2016).

Despite such claims, however, after two and a half decades of economic reforms, the per capita consumption of beauty products in India is still among the lowest in the world. This is true even when comparing among BRIC nations (the major emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China); annual per capita expenditure on beauty and personal care products in India in 2017 stood at only USD 7 to China's USD 33 (Indian Beauty & Hygiene Association and A.T. Kearney, 2017: 5). In 2010, even among urban households that bought makeup, the average monthly expenditure on lipsticks and nail polishes was only INR 38 and INR 32 (approximately USD 0.60 and 0.40), respectively (Datta, 2012: 227). At present, little is known about why beauty product sales in the country remain stubbornly resistant to aspirational marketing efforts.

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty describes histories of capitalism as adhering to one of two conventions: either globalizing capital destroys local contingent differences or it domesticates and commodifies them into a set of preferences that can be offered up for consumption. The consumerist view is a view that dominates the marketing imagination:

"Repeat after me," the *Wall Street Journal* of 11 October 1996 has the Indian "marketing guru" Titoo Ahluwalia saying to potential American explorers of the Indian market: "India is different, India is different, India is different..." The aim of his statement is to help transnational capital appreciate and transform (Indian) historical and cultural differences so that such differences could be treated as measures of preference or taste. Making different life choices would then be like choosing between different brands of products.

Difference initially appears intractable in this discussion among capitalists... Indian social practices appear to have the effect of deferring – and thus making different – India's adoption of certain themes generally canonical for both classical and late-capitalist modernity. India seems to resist these capitalist ideals: dissolution of the hierarchies of birth (Indians continue with paternal/parental authority); sovereignty of the individual (the norm of the extended family persists); and consumer choice (yuppies defer to their elders). (Chakrabarty, 2000: 48–49)

In this article, we present ethnographic depth on how local beauty cultures affect understandings of bodily aesthetics to create hybrid beauty practices and how marketing efforts seek to channel these practices into consumer behavior. We examine some of the major points of contingent difference linked to low volumes

of cosmetics sales in India and explore the approaches adopted by advertisers and marketers of beauty products to convert such difference into new imaginaries that foster mass consumption.

Most studies of beauty in India have focused on exploring its links with representations of the gendered nation (e.g. Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Oza, 2001; Thapan, 2004). Anthropologists have also pointed to changes in middle-class subjectivity related to physical appearance (Pathak, 2014) and the negotiations involved in balancing these emerging subjectivities and desires for “fashionable” femininity with “respectable” gender performances (Gilbertson, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 2009). However, little attention has been paid to the creation and marketing of tastes and desires by the beauty industry and women’s engagement with these desires. A close examination of women’s beauty work reveals the connections between the use of beauty products and the quest for a better life and the frictions that result as market logic expands into the domains of biological, sexual, and social experience. In investigating these tensions and negotiations, our focus is on segments of the urban middle class and the lower class in India (the target demographic for mass marketers). Fernandes and Heller (2006) have outlined three segments of the Indian middle class: those with professional educational credentials, a *petit bourgeoisie* comprising merchants and shopkeepers who attempt to emulate the professionals, and educated non-professionals in lower ranking jobs. We include both the professional middle class and the *petit bourgeoisie* in the upper-middle class and consider the educated non-professionals to form the lower-middle class. The lower class we define as those living in informal slum housing.

The majority of the ethnographic interviews presented in this article were carried out in Mumbai, India’s commercial and media capital, in 2013. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University of Arizona. A purposive sample of 58 participants was identified through personal networks known to the first author (G.P.), who has conducted long-term fieldwork in Mumbai on a range of issues concerning women’s health and presentation of self. Open-ended interviews were conducted in Mumbai with key informants ($n=8$) on topics including acceptable presentations of self for urban women, ideas about appropriate makeup use, and everyday beauty practices. Findings from these interviews were used to develop a semi-structured questionnaire used with women aged 20–35 from the upper-middle class ($n=10$), lower-middle class ($n=10$), and lower-class ($n=10$). Follow-up interviews with key informants were conducted in 2017 to examine changing beauty practices. Extensive notes were taken, reviewed, and analyzed for key themes by both authors.

Interviews were also conducted with advertising and marketing executives who have beauty industry clients ($n=5$); beauty magazine editors and journalists ($n=5$); sales staff in beauty product shops and pharmacies ($n=5$); and beauty-salon owners ($n=5$). Pharmacy sales staff and beauty-salon owners selected for interviews worked in established popular shops that had a large clientele. In a second field site in Mangalore (Karnataka), the second author (M.N.), who has

been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the region for two decades, collected observational data and conducted informal discussions with pharmacists, sales staff, and salon owners. Mangalore is one of India's centers for higher education, with young people from all over the country, making it an excellent place to observe changes in beauty practices over time. The article also draws on both authors' long-term participant observation of everyday beauty practices enacted in homes, colleges, and beauty spaces in lower-income and middle-class neighborhoods.

Advertisements from five popular Indian beauty magazines (*Femina*, *Elle*, *Grih Shobha*, *Woman's Era*, and *New Woman*) and from online websites of specific brands (e.g. L'Oreal India, Pantene) were collected in 2013–2014, and then again in 2017, to identify key themes pointed out by our marketing interlocutors. We also observed and photographed advertisements posted at the point of sale in pharmacies and supermarkets as well as on large roadside billboards. Advertisements were grouped and analyzed thematically; coding advertisements was an iterative process, and those selected for inclusion in the article reflect key themes that also emerged in women's narratives.

The beauty industry in India

In the decades immediately following India's independence, economic policy, born of long experience of colonial exploitation, was largely protectionist. Businesses faced heavy regulations, the state directed resource allocation, and high tariffs discouraged imports. The result was an economy of shortages with limited consumer choices. Continuing high levels of poverty and inequality in post-independence India meant that the vast majority of the population could barely afford consumer products. The beauty industry – comprising a plethora of products, including color cosmetics (makeup such as lipstick, eyeliner, nail polish, etc.), hair color, skin creams, and so on – overlaps with personal care products and toiletries such as shampoos, moisturizers, and body washes. Beauty products, including toiletries, were viewed by the government as frivolous, non-essential items, classed in the same category as cigarettes, and subjected to high taxes. In 1979, for example, domestic duties on beauty products stood at 105%, and in 1993, they were as high as 120% (Saxena, 2009: 696; Singh and Sethi, 1982). The industry therefore relied largely upon toiletries sold to urban middle-class consumers for profits (Jones, 2010: 129). The elite bought their cosmetics abroad. Even in the 1980s, only three companies – Lakmé, Tips and Toes, and Max Factor – sold cosmetics (lipsticks and nail polishes), and they targeted a largely urban upper middle-class demographic.

The market for imported products shifted after economic liberalization. Lured by the estimated 200 million–250 million consumers in India's "exploding middle class" (Fernandes, 2000; Mazzarella, 2003), international players started closely eyeing the Indian market. The earliest entrant, in 1991, was the French multinational L'Oréal. In 1993, excise duties on personal care items were reduced

from 120% to 70%, providing further encouragement (Rattanani, 1994). Revlon International entered a joint venture with Modi Mundipharma to bring their products to India in 1994 (Women's Wear Daily (WWD), 1994), the Indian firm Baccarose tied up with the Swiss Torstone to market the cosmetics brand Chambor, the German brand Benckiser introduced their perfume and skincare lines, and others followed suit. At present, India has a well-developed retail and online beauty landscape with a large variety of local and global brands.

Nevertheless, only one-half of Indian households purchase shampoo, just under one-fourth buy skincare products, and only about 10% purchase hair conditioners (L'Oréal, 2016; Datta, 2012: 223). Flexible packaging, which includes small sachets priced at INR 1–10 (around USD 0.02–0.20), is the dominant form of packaging, contributing 54% of total packaging volumes (Global Cosmetic Industry (GCI), 2013); it is used to sell shampoos, hair colorants, soaps, and facial moisturizers throughout the country. Even when products are bought in larger sizes, they are commonly shared across the household rather than used by individual members. The beauty and personal care segment is still dominated by personal care products. The body and hair care categories were the largest in terms of sales in 2016, comprising 69% of market share, with color cosmetics contributing only 12% (Indian Beauty & Hygiene Association and A.T. Kearney, 2017: 6). Regional differences are considerable: urban areas contribute about 51% of all sales in the beauty and personal care categories; of this, the major metropolises contribute 33% (Indian Beauty & Hygiene Association and A.T. Kearney, 2017: 9). Thus, beauty and personal care products still have limited overall sales in India.

The lure of the untouched consumer

Frustration with this state of affairs was common among our interlocutors in the beauty industry. Amisha Patel, who heads Iris International, a pioneer in international beauty brand management in India, explained it thus:

If you take the population of around 1 billion, around half of that are women. If you take say half of that [Indian women], and they are buying a lipstick a year, we should be selling around 25 million lipsticks a year, okay if not that, at least 15 million – but we are nowhere near that figure.

Industry magazines repeatedly touted the potential for growth; increasing incomes, an increase in women's labor force participation, and a young population were often cited as indicators that this potential would soon fructify into increased sales and volumes. However, we found that the focus on the tremendous, yet-to-be-explored potential – especially as opposed to disappointing actual performance – had been a recurring theme for quite some time.

As far back as 1982, an *India Today* article pointed out low per capita beauty consumption and discussed changes in the industry that were likely to

encourage growth (Singh and Sethi, 1982). Another article from *India Today* in 1996 noted that

The per-capita expenditure on cosmetics is abysmally low at \$0.68 (Rs. 24) compared to Korea's \$36.65 (Rs. 1,284). The urban Indian woman's per capita consumption of shampoos is 24 gm and skin-care items 18 gm – 10 times less than in other developing countries like Thailand and Indonesia. (Nandi and Jain, 1996)

The authors contended that with economic liberalization and the milestone wins of Indian women in major beauty pageants (Miss Universe and Miss World) in the 1990s, this lag was set to change. Yet, even today, sales figures remain low. While the overall penetration of goods such as shampoos might be on the rise given greater overall prosperity in India, sales of makeup and other beauty products do not seem to have kept pace, despite the influx of new brands and products. A key focus for the beauty industry has therefore been on understanding and closing the gap between the putatively immense potential and subpar actual consumption. Indeed, the “untapped potential” of the Indian beauty market continues to be emphasized in articles, market research, and even the strategy reports of beauty companies themselves.

In his book on advertising in India in the early years of liberalization, William Mazzarella (2003) describes how Indian marketers and advertisers “merchandised” inflated estimates of the Indian middle class and its buying power to foreign investors and corporations in order to ensure their own status as middlemen (p. 266). Moreover, much of the research that these marketing consultants engaged in was media research, marked by a self-referentiality in which respondents were always-already interpellated as consumers. Our observations in market research and strategy meetings revealed a similar circular discourse, with research often conducted by interns based on media analysis, perception audits, or demographic projections rather than empirical evidence. Marketing projections of the untapped potential of the market traded in self-referential expectations, betraying a lack of understanding of the everyday realities of would-be consumers.

Contingent difference

In contrast to marketers' projections, ethnographic fieldwork revealed three key overlapping points of contingent difference when it came to women's consumption of beauty products. One of the most immediate barriers to consumption was women's lack of embodied knowledge regarding beauty-related consumer practices. Many women in their late 20s and 30s had little experience with beauty products; these products had not been easily available when they were growing up. Some upper-middle class women we interviewed admitted that they did not know how to use beauty products such as mascara, concealer, and even eyeliner, and they described feeling intimidated by the theatrically made-up sales staff of certain international makeup brands. Moreover, in spite of a new focus on physical appearance

with the emergence of imperatives to be “presentable” through the appropriate consumption of beauty products and services (Pathak, 2014), most of the women we spoke with distinguished being presentable from the use of makeup. Being presentable was tied more to expectations that women have hairstyles that demonstrate salon visits and regular maintenance, color their hair to cover grays, have their eyebrows shaped, depilate bodily hair and upper lips, and use sunscreen or creams to combat skin issues such as pigmentation. The only expectation related to makeup was the ability to wear lip-gloss and eyeliner. In fact, inappropriately applied makeup detracted from presentability, marking a woman as a beauty novice. Makeup was seen as related to adornment rather than grooming, and women spoke of it being a hassle given the tropical heat or the time required for daily application. Thus, women expressed an embodied relationship with makeup where it was experienced as an excess, a pleasurable addition rather than a necessary part of their social skin (we explore these issues further in another publication). This was in contrast to studies based in Euro-America that found that women spoke of feeling incomplete or insecure without makeup, such that makeup was not just about looking good but also about feeling good (Clarke and Bundon, 2009; McCabe et al., 2017).

This unique embodied relationship to makeup has long-standing cultural meaning and is linked to conceptual frameworks of self-adornment and the life stage. The wearing of makeup is understood through the local category of *sringar*, which means self-adornment but includes associations with the erotic and with preparation for the physical act of love, typically sanctioned for middle-class women only within the context of married life. There is a strong cultural expectation to prioritize study across all years of formal education, and students are discouraged from *sringar*, which is seen as a distraction. To this end, schools carefully police students’ engagement with fashion and makeup. School uniforms are the norm, as are daily checks on nail length (nails must be very short), makeup (none allowed), hairstyles (hair must be tied back in prescribed styles if long), jewelry (only discrete earrings or religious jewelry in certain cases), and so on. Upper middle-class schools, with lower student–teacher ratios, are the most stringent; lower class or free government schools the least, because of high student–teacher ratios that make strict policing unfeasible. As a result, girls and young women, especially of the middle class, grow up associating makeup with special occasions and without becoming habituated to daily makeup use.

Another related area of contingent difference revolves around the negotiation of “respectable” femininity and its relation to *sringar*. Scholars of South Asia have chronicled how notions of respectable femininity among the larger middle class in India – the class central to the imagination of the Indian nation – are tied to women’s careful engagement with the “modern” (Chatterjee, 1993; Donner and de Neve, 2011; Gilbertson, 2014; Lukose, 2009; Radhakrishnan, 2009). Middle-class women in contemporary India are expected to balance the performance of a reified tradition – demonstrated by an orientation to family and avoidance of behaviors associated with the West such as smoking, drinking, partying, and pre-marital relationships – and a reified modernity, associated with education,

consumer culture, and cosmopolitanism. Middle-class practices of distinction rest upon women distancing themselves from not only the lower classes, portrayed as illiterate, regressive, and promiscuous, but also the upper classes, considered morally degenerate, promiscuous, and Westernized. Against this backdrop, where women's sexuality is a source of anxiety for both the middle class and the nation, makeup is often associated with women actively expressing their sexuality and soliciting the male gaze. Notions of appropriate adornment in India rest upon contextual limits placed on the use of makeup, and although women have been challenging these interpretations, inappropriate or heavy makeup can be seen as immoral and can harm a woman's – and her family's – reputation and honor. Together, these interrelated dynamics hamper the expansion of mass markets in beauty products, particularly makeup. Thus, the middle class, the class with the disposable income that makes it a key target of mass marketers, has an embodied relationship with makeup that renders it resistant to high volume and high frequency per capita consumption.

Advertising beauty: Converting contingent difference into commodified preferences

One of the goals of advertising of beauty products in India has been to reframe these products to reduce their threat to notions of female respectability. Specifically, advertisers have had to skillfully speak to notions of tradition and Indianness while connecting beauty products with modernity, cosmopolitanism, and sexual desirability. To accomplish this, the industry has adopted four major strategies to convert the contingent differences mentioned earlier into preferences that facilitate consumption: (1) educating customers to create new consumer subjectivities, (2) resignifying the consumption of beauty products as for a woman's own pleasure and empowerment instead of as being targeted at a scopophilic male gaze, (3) stressing the links between beauty products and wellness and purity rather than *sringar*, and (4) commodifying traditional beauty practices.

Creating and educating consumers. To aid the development of consumption-oriented subjectivities by helping women learn how to use beauty products, beauty magazines, such as *Femina* and *Elle*, emphasize “educational” segments. Such segments presume no prior knowledge of beauty products and provide introductions to their purpose and use. The editor at the Indian edition of an international beauty magazine told the first author that thanks to educational segments, beauty companies were the primary advertisers in women's magazines in India. This, she said, was in contrast to women's magazines in Europe and the United States, where fashion drives advertising income. Supermarkets and malls (e.g. makeup counters) also offer educational services as a necessary component of their sales, allowing women to test products and learn how to use them.

For people unfamiliar with the bodily praxis and techniques required to navigate post-liberalization spaces of consumption such as malls and department

stores, shopping can be daunting (e.g. McGuire, 2011). In *It Happened in India*, Kishore Biyani, the founder of one of India's largest retail groups, describes how he transformed India's organized retail sector by creating stores non-intimidating to middle-class shoppers (Biyani and Baishya, 2007). His stores mimic the feel of local *kirana* (mom-and-pop) stores through features such as crowded aisles and old clothes exchange schemes, allowing lower middle- and lower-class shoppers to feel comfortable. During fieldwork, we found that chemist's shops (pharmacies), ubiquitous even before liberalization, formed such similarly non-intimidating, familiar spaces in which non-upper class women could learn about beauty products.

Staff in Mumbai and Mangalore told us that sales of beauty and personal care products in pharmacies had steadily increased over the past decade, and these shops had become important avenues for product placement. Married middle-class homemakers tended to be the biggest consumers of beauty products in chemist's shops, even spending between INR 2000 and 4000 (around USD 30–60) at a time. Women working outside the home also visited pharmacies during their lunch breaks to shop for beauty products as a pleasurable activity. Waiting for medicines to be located allowed individuals time to browse and ask product-related questions of counter staff. These shops also represented an important merger of health and beauty, reinforcing advertising messages that buying beauty products is good for overall wellness (elaborated upon below). As a result, chemist's shops received frequent visits from beauty brand representatives who incentivized the placement of products in strategic locations.

Middle- and higher-income neighborhoods tended to have more chemists' stores (although these stores were also patronized by women from lower socioeconomic strata working in the area), grocery-style retailers stocking beauty products, and shops dedicated to beauty products. In contrast, low-income neighborhoods were dominated by small, non-grocery shops selling prominently displayed sachets of beauty products, such as shampoos and lightening creams like Fair & Lovely, along with general products such as penny snacks sold out of glass jars. Similar to chemist's shops, such stores allow for browsing while waiting for products to be located, and sachets make products more affordable for the poor while also allowing for experimentation and individual choice and seeding the market for future brand loyalty.

"Beauty parlors" (salons) were another important avenue for women to learn about beauty products and practices. Since the 1990s, there has been an expansion of beauty parlors in India, and visits to parlors (as they are also known) are not limited to the higher socioeconomic strata. Lower-income neighborhoods and slums have parlors that offer services such as waxing, threading, facials, cleanups (mini-facials), hair styling, henna designs for palms and feet, and scalp oil massages. Given the growing interest in slimmer body ideals in India, many of these parlors also promise weight-loss solutions. We observed women in low-income neighborhoods who came to parlors for facials, cleanups (mini-facials), facial bleaching, and hair styling, spending around INR 200–300 (USD 3–4). Most of

these women were married, and parlor owners confirmed that the bulk of their clients were either married or women working outside the home who visited during their lunch break. Even today, marriage legitimates a middle- or lower-middle class woman's interest in her appearance. Employment acts as another legitimating factor, allowing women to justify spending on beauty through the imperative to be presentable as a condition of employment. It also makes such consumption more economically accessible to lower-class and lower-middle-class women.

Most parlors (except a few in upper-class or upper-middle-class areas) are women-only spaces, where women can learn about beauty and engage in self-care freely. Women would frequently ask for advice from parlor owners or staff on fashion, solutions for issues such as pigmentation or hair loss, and new beauty products and services. Recognizing that parlors are important sites for learning about beauty practices, brands such as Lakmé and L'Oréal have opened their own salon franchises targeting the middle class and upper-middle class as part of a strategy to educate consumers.

Resignifying beauty consumption as empowering to women. Advertisers have also appropriated and resignified feminist discourses by framing beauty products as empowering to women and linking them to pleasure through consumption centered on the self. Although feminist scholars have critiqued the beauty industry for its promotion of oppressive beauty standards (Bordo, 1995; Wolf, 1991), within Western public discourse, the commodified beauty practices of women in the Global South are portrayed and evaluated as signs of corporeal modernity, emancipation from patriarchal norms, and engagement with democratic ideals (Fluri, 2009; Lazar, 2006). Such feminism, which has been termed "commodity feminism" (Goldman, 1992) or "commercial femininities" (McRobbie, 1996), popularizes feminist ideals of self-worth and female autonomy while distancing itself from feminism as politics.

Advertising for beauty products in India draws on such commodity feminist themes as female entitlement, individualism, freedom and mobility, and choice. It also plays off aspirations for participation in global consumer culture, social mobility, and reinvention, promising improved careers and marriage prospects. For example, advertising for L'Oréal cosmetics, through the tagline "Because you're worth it," indexes the notion of entitlement to the products, and, by extension the life, that one desires and deserves. An advertisement for a shampoo by the global brand Pantene similarly stresses individuality, entitlement, and choice, announcing, "You Try, You Decide." This advertisement (Figure 1), features a Bollywood star with long, thick black hair – a culturally salient beauty ideal – that she purportedly maintains through the use of Pantene. She invites readers to try Pantene and gain the same positive results. The tagline, "Split up from split ends within 14 days, just like I did" references a modern self by playing upon associations with pre-marital romantic relationships (which have, until fairly recently, been socially unacceptable for most middle-class women in India) and a woman's ability to get out of a bad relationship. Women are implored to try the product and decide for themselves, rather than being influenced by family.



Figure 1. Pantene Pro-V print ad featuring the Bollywood star Katrina Kaif.

Meanwhile, an advertisement for the most popular fairness cream in India, Fair & Lovely (Figure 2), promises freedom and unencumbered mobility in public space. The ad features a woman, her face covered by a *dupatta*, or scarf. The positioning of the *dupatta* is reminiscent of a veiled woman, alluding to the common practice of urban Indian women covering their faces to prevent sun exposure and skin darkening. The ad promises that the product will allow a woman to retain glowing skin without covering her face. By portraying such facial covering as akin to the veil, the advertisement plays upon representations of veiled women as oppressed, and links freedom to consume the product with freedom from “traditional” patriarchal constraints. Thus, advertising for beauty products portrays women’s consumption as progressive, empowered, and modern, reframing such consumption away from older associations with personal vanity.

Advertisements have also attempted to move away from associations with *sringar* and the scopophilic gaze by stressing makeup products as props in the presentations of self required by work outside the home. An ad for Lakmé’s 9 to 5 range of cosmetics – whose name references the office workday – features a young, demure-looking woman, eyes slightly downcast, wearing a light pink lipstick and holding her polished, pink nails in front of her face (Figure 3). The tagline for these products is simply “Reinvent 9 to 5,” indexing how a modern woman can subtly transform her look between home and the office. By using the term *reinvent*, the ad also suggests that women can shed their office presentation of self once home, allowing them to balance domesticity and employment. Here, makeup is tied to

Fair & Lovely | **ADVANCED MULTI VITAMIN™**

निखार को धूप से बचाना है
तो अब सिर्फ़ दुपट्टा नहीं, **फ़ेयर एंड लवली**.

चेहरे के निखार को सुरक्षित रखने के लिए लड़कियाँ अक्सर
चेहरे को दुपट्टे से ढक लेती हैं. लेकिन ऐसे नुस्खे घर तक ही
चलते हैं, बाहर नहीं. इसीलिए अब से घरेलू नुस्खे हटाओ और
फ़ेयर एंड लवली अपनाओ. इसका एडवांस्ड मल्टीविटामिन
फ़ॉर्मूला आपकी त्वचा की गहराई में जा कर दाग-धब्बे मिटाए
और आपको दे बेहतरीन निखार.

FREE20% Extra**

Fair & Lovely

ADVANCED MULTI VITAMIN™

SKIN
FIRMING SOLUTION

₹5/-

4.5g+0.9g

मध्यमका विज्ञापन

Figure 2. Hindi print ad for Fair & Lovely fairness cream.

MONDAY MORNING PINKS

9to5 THE OFFICE STYLIST

No more Monday morning blues. It's muted pinks and peaches all the way, all through the day. Without any touch-ups.

LAKMÉ 9to5 REINVENT

Salon Expertise Skincare Solutions Professional Makeup

"Subtle and neutral lip colors are the most famous for any professional makeup." Cheryl B. Celebrity Makeup Artist

MODEL IS WEARING LAKMÉ 9to5 NAIL COLOR IN SHADES RUBY MONDAY & CANDY PINKS & LAKMÉ 9to5 LIP COLOR IN SHADES PINKY PINK

Follow Lakmé on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for exciting offers & updates. Catch the season's hottest trends on www.lakme.com

Pública Ambience/9067044

Figure 3. Print ad for Lakmé's 9 to 5 range of makeup.

career prospects, female financial independence, and employment as a justification for respectable engagement with beauty work.

Negotiating beauty work: Ritual purity and wellness. Another strategy adopted both by advertisers and by women wishing to engage in beauty work has been to highlight the role of beauty products in addressing key cultural concerns such as cleanliness, purity, and wellness to downplay associations with *sringar*. In public discourse, concerns about health, including commentary on stress and pollution, are often linked to defective modernization (Nichter, 2001). Indigenous concerns such as “hair fall” (i.e. hair thinning or premature hair loss), premature graying, and dull skin are linked to the weakening of the body caused by environmental pollution; hair and skin are treated as markers of overall wellness. As one parlor owner explained, “Hair fall occurs because people are thinking too much . . . it is all the stress and tension of our daily lives that does this.” Several salon owners linked hair fall and early graying to contaminated water and food and to chemicals in shampoos and dyes. To counter these problems, advertisements for hair and skin products emphasize an association between hair products and enhanced wellness; products are marketed as returning the consumer to an original, purer state and reducing the damage caused by the stressors of modern life. One beauty-salon owner pointed to the connections between health and “natural” products by commenting, “Nowadays, we use gentle bleaches, a bleach that has medicinal qualities. These are natural, herbal products.” The selling of beauty products at pharmacies (discussed earlier) also emphasizes this important link between beauty and enhanced wellness.

Marketing products as ayurvedic, “natural,” herbal, and free from harsh chemicals – and therefore related to health and vitality rather than vanity – is a popular strategy. Both Indian and global beauty companies have paid attention to natural or ayurvedic products as one of the fastest growing segments in the beauty and personal care sector, expected to grow at 12% per year (Euromonitor International, 2011; Singh, 2017). Appealing to indigenous concerns, the French company L’Oréal now markets an ayurvedic shampoo, conditioner, and oil, and Unilever has launched the Ayush product line. Patanjali Ayurveda, one of the most popular brands in India today for shampoos, soaps, and beauty products, references the author of the classical Yoga Sutras, Patanjali. Brand names such as this connote civilizational wisdom and offer a means of purification in an environment where toxicity is a major concern.

Advertisements for ayurvedic or natural products often allude to “traditional knowledge” being passed down within families. The tagline for the brand Ayush declares, “5000 year old Ayurveda for today’s beauty problems,” suggesting continuity between the company’s products and Indian traditions. Ads for herbal beauty products also heavily feature mothers and grandmothers as sources of generational wisdom, in contrast to ads for commercial beauty products that feature celebrities, experts, or friends. For example, an advertisement for Patanjali Ayurveda hair cleanser (shampoo) features a mother and daughter duo, the

mother's hand touching the daughter's hair in the aspect of a benediction, with the blessing, "*Jug jug jiyo*" (May you live many centuries) for a tagline (Figure 4).

In *Shoveling Smoke*, William Mazzarella (2003) points out the conundrum faced by Indian brands in relation to their multinational competitors in the early years of liberalization – they made auto-orientalist appeals, stressing the difference between "Indianness" and "Indian tradition" from Westernized modernity, but "for this 'Indianness' to be acceptable, it also had to be certifiably 'world-class'" (p. 159). For Indian beauty brands, which cannot always function as markers of distinction in terms of modernity and cosmopolitanism in the way that multinational brands can, this focus on Indianness has taken the form of "ayurvedic" or herbal-based products in modern packaging, and international brands have been forced to take note. International beauty brands and many Indian/ayurvedic beauty brands are virtually indistinguishable in terms of packaging, although their advertising messages differ considerably.

Associations with concepts of purity and cleanliness were another indigenizing theme that we heard referenced many times. For example, one parlor owner explained that her job was to "clean a woman up, make her presentable, give her confidence in herself." She added,

[Upper-middle-class] Women are bringing their daughters much earlier now – even girls of 8–12 years are brought in for waxing and threading [eyebrow shaping]... girls feel their underarms are looking very dirty. If they are not clean, they feel a complex in school.

Her quote speaks both to changing subjectivities and how these subjectivities link beauty work to feeling clean. We frequently heard that not feeling clean would lead



Figure 4. Patanjali Ayurveda ad for Kesh Kanti hair cleanser.

to girls and young women feeling inferior as they compared themselves to others in the classroom, and engaging in a “cleanup” (whose very name relies on an association with hygiene) enhanced women’s confidence. Brands have taken notice, and Fair & Lovely markets a product aptly titled “Pollution Clean-Up Face Wash.”

The importance of feeling clean was not confined to adolescence. For example, 33-year old Simran also spoke of feeling clean after having her arms and legs waxed. Being clean referenced the lack of bodily hair, visible marks on one’s skin (acne, scars), dark circles, and pigmentation – and of removing, to use Mary Douglas’s (2004) formulation, “matter out of place.” Thus, facial and bodily hair, blackheads, and even tans are not just portrayed, but also *experienced* by women, especially upper middle-class women, as signs of bodily uncleanness. Many beauty services offered waxing, threading, cleanups, and anti-tan treatments (treatments to get rid of tans; often a euphemism for skin lightening) as part of pedicures and manicures. These feelings of personal cleanliness tie in to notions of purity intricately associated with a Hindu caste-based cosmology. Purity, linked to higher-caste status, is thus refracted through the lens of class into notions of cleanliness, personal hygiene, and grooming. Makeup, however, cannot be neatly encompassed by this notion of cleanliness. As an addition, it is also easily viewed as an excess and is much less acceptable among the middle classes than parlor visits. Makeup is also much more visible than personal care products that promise beauty without any overt indication of beauty work – such as shampoos that fight hair fall, creams that hydrate, or cleansers that reduce sun damage. As a result, both upper- and lower-middle-class interlocutors spoke more of using personal care products (shampoos, hair oil, face washes, etc.) than beauty products such as anti-aging creams.

Commodifying traditional beauty practices. Another strategy used by marketers of beauty products has been to repackage products traditionally used in beauty work, such as *kajal* (kohl; an eye cosmetic used to darken the lower lash line), leveraging the acceptability of traditional practices. Companies such as Maybelline and Revlon have been marketing *kajal* in an easy-to-use pencil format that can be used as both an eyeliner and a *kajal* at an affordable price point. In its early days, hair color was also marketed through its associations with the hennaing of hair to cover grays. Even today, coloring hair in the absence of grays is rare, and interlocutors expressed concerns about the “side effects” of hair dye. For example, 37-year-old Sadhana, who started coloring her hair to cover grays, commented, “I started coloring, and *tab se mere baal zyaada hi gray huein hain* [since then my hair became even more gray]. Those chemicals go into the scalp and affect it finally.” Some interlocutors believed that regular dyeing of hair would result in a bodily dependency on such products. As a result, even beauty parlor staff discouraged the regular use of hair dye until there was a significant volume of gray strands. Practices of scalp oil massages – which have long been used in India to “cool one’s brain” or calm the mind – have been similarly seized upon by marketers of shampoos, conditioners, and hair serums with claims that their products include oil as a key ingredient or that they deliver the benefits of oil without the greasiness.

A product called Pantene Oil Replacement, for example, is described on the Pantene Facebook site as “Your non-oil companion, which you can use without worry of it damaging your bed sheets or clothes.”

Products are also marketed based on the established Indian quest for fairness. This is an extremely popular category, with high sales and high market segmentation; about 58% of all households in urban India buy fairness creams (Datta, 2012: 225). Differentiated products promise fairer faces, bodily skin, underarms, and even vaginas. Fairness, particularly in the lower socioeconomic strata, has material consequences. As one interlocutor commented, “If you are very dark but with a good job, maybe the boy [prospective groom] and his parents would not mind too much.” What she was pointing to is that being dark skinned can make it difficult to find a spouse, although darkness may be overlooked if one has other assets such as a good job or a high dowry. Nevertheless, the *Businessworld Marketing Whitebook 2012–2013* noted that “[marketing] communication on fairness creams has changed from finding a better match for oneself to building self confidence and bringing a more modern outlook in life to the consumers at large” (Datta, 2012: 226). Fairness is thus moving from being marketed as instrumental to improved matrimonial prospects toward being marketed as promoting self-esteem. Using fairness treatments is now being framed as a choice that a woman undertakes for her own pleasure rather than for external approval, similar to the experience of feeling confident through the use of makeup chronicled by McCabe et al. (2017) among women in the United States. This also constitutes a new subjectivity of “cosmopolitan whiteness” (Saraswati, 2010). Such whiteness connotes global mobility and the ability to fit into global consumer culture (still dominated by the Global North and white-centric beauty ideals) as well as the ability to conform to indigenous beauty ideals related to fair skin.

Of late, many fairness products are also glossed as “anti-tanning,” meaning products to reduce or prevent pigmentation. Anti-tanning, usually a euphemism for lightening, suggests the ability to restore an individual to an undamaged and purer state. Advertisements for such products imply that underneath dark skin is a whiter self, which can be reclaimed through use of the product. For example, an advertisement for Pond’s White Beauty face wash proclaims, “Reveal the natural fairness hiding behind dark skin cells.” Salons also offer “tan removal” through facials and pedicures, and we observed many women undergoing facial bleaches as part of beauty treatments. In fact, a key interlocutor explained that whitening services are so commonplace that it is assumed that every woman will want them as a component of other beauty treatments. When she went for her pre-bridal skin package, it was implicit that she would want the included full-body fairness treatment as well.

Conclusion

Despite market research and industry claims regarding the immense and untapped potential of the beauty space in India, relatively low sales when compared to other BRIC nations have not been adequately explained. Market research has tended to

rely on self-referential media analysis and demographic projections rather than investigations into the everyday realities of makeup use. In contrast, our ethnographic analysis has pointed to how the notion of *sringar* and its links to the life stage and notions of respectability form overlapping areas of contingent difference that affect understandings of bodily aesthetics and, hence, local beauty cultures. Beauty practices form highly embodied consumption practices that provide a window into how Indian women balance pressures to conform to ideals of tradition and modernity in their daily lives. Makeup use is associated with *sringar* and self-adornment, which limits the contexts and life stages during which it is considered appropriate and results in resistance toward high volume and high frequency consumption of makeup products. Indian women need to carefully negotiate notions of respectable femininity as they wear makeup to appear presentable while avoiding the negative connotations that doing so may carry. Through such negotiations, they challenge and shift notions of respectability, which will continue to change over time.

In popular and marketing discourse, the persistence of local preferences and failure to convert behaviors and history into globalized tastes is often read as an anticolonial triumph of culture and identity. This discourse was particularly popular in the early years of economic liberalization in India, as the country grappled with preserving its national and cultural identity in the face of globalizing capital. Thus, resistance to beauty consumption and the inability to achieve high levels of per capita sales can be read as a victory. Instead, however, we argue that it points to the frictions generated as market forces penetrate aspects of social life and embodied experience. Even though sales of makeup remain lower than expected, local adaptation and skillful marketing have opened up new avenues for consumption related to beauty. Beauty products are marketed in terms of indigenous concerns (such as hair loss or fairness) and presented in such a way that they encompass culturally salient issues such as wellness, purity, and cleanliness. Although bodily aesthetics may not seem to have changed drastically, with hybrid and local – rather than universalized and global – tastes and practices emerging out of this encounter with global market forces, the practices through which these hybrid aesthetics are achieved have been commodified. Thus, the terms of the conversation are set through a commodified framework, changing the political economy of beauty.

Of particular importance, beauty products are marketed as enhancing a woman's self-confidence and presentability, qualities deemed indispensable for success in a society increasingly characterized by aspiration and image. Advertisements model the hybrid performances required of Indian women. The incorporation of traditional beauty values in advertisements for new products reproduces the balancing of a reified tradition with a reified modernity that is also required of women; the ubiquity of advertisements for beauty products makes these products appear more normative in a changing environment. As discussed in this article, advertisements stress beauty products as enhancing a woman's feeling about herself from the inside out – moving from concern with an external gaze to the internalization of that gaze under the guise of “confidence” and “cleanliness.” Enhanced self-confidence is particularly salient as

more Indian women engage in work outside the home and negotiate these two worlds, as well as the role transitions associated with them.

One key difference between India and some countries in the Southeast Asia region (such as Indonesia and Thailand) and other BRIC nations is a lack of experimentation with beauty products during adolescence and young adulthood. In India, this is largely the result of the strong cultural expectation to prioritize study during years of schooling and of the need to maintain respectability. These ideals are enforced by parental surveillance at home and disciplining in schools (for both lower and middle-income students), where students who wear makeup or dress inappropriately face punitive measures. As a result, young women have limited opportunity to “try on new selves” through experimentation with makeup and beauty products. Even as women move through young adulthood and marriage, myriad factors continue to constrain regular makeup use. While light makeup has become acceptable – and indeed, required – in many urban workplaces – there remain cultural and economic barriers to high-level and overt engagement with the changing of one’s appearance through consumption of beauty products.

Beauty blogs and vlogs (video logs) and the posting of beauty “hauls” (shopping) are contributing to changing practices and product consumption in India, as the country has seen a rise in online beauty gurus who document their everyday makeup routines and review products. The rise of “beauty influencers” who provide in-depth tutorials may well provide middle-class youth with new opportunities for discreet learning, consumption, and experimentation in ways that allow for feedback from peers while avoiding surveillance of elders. Looking to the future, it will be important to follow how women in India continue to renegotiate the culturally appropriate boundaries of respectability, self-presentation, and the use of beauty products as they navigate between spaces of tradition and modernity.

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