

HYPER-GLOCAL REALITIES: THROUGH THE LENS OF LINGERIE ADVERTISING IN INDIA

The increasing numbers of catwalk shows which blend global styles with local styles reinforce the idea of fashion as a growing ‘*glocal*’ phenomenon - Indian fashion weeks are no exception to this glocal reality.

The *Fashion Design Council India* strives to promote global competitiveness, however the recent growth of lingerie shows appearing at Indian fashion weeks which adhere to western mainstream fashion norms, challenge the degree to which the local is progressively being overshadowed by the global. Therefore, this paper evaluates the meanings of glocalisation during the lingerie industry growth years of 2004 -2007, by analysing global brand lingerie advertising from the researcher’s content analysis of the magazines *Femina* and *Vogue India*,

Researcher’s preliminary findings reflect the paradoxical power meanings of glocalisation which are embodied within lingerie advertising – wherein the glocal is evident, yet continues to operate within dominant ethnocentric marketing frameworks. Furthermore, the paper looks at whether current glocal strategies risk relegating Indian identities to that of superior western identities – ultimately re-inscribing and re-circulating concepts of Saidian (1973) Orientalism?

By analysing the marketing rhetoric of *glocalisation* within global brand lingerie advertising, this paper raises consciousness around how the Indian woman’s body risks becoming a site of reflexive struggle between the east and west during post-liberation.

Keywords: *Lingerie. India. Glocalisation. Advertising.*

The Blending of Global and Local in Indian Fashion Weeks

The bi-annual *Lakmé India Fashion Week* (LIFW) was created by the *Fashion Design Council of India* (FDCI) in New Delhi 2000 with a mission to redefine the future of fashion and integrate India into the global fashion world (Lakmé 2011). Although designers such as *Manish Arora*, *Rohit Bal* have managed to gain international recognition beyond *LIFW*, successful designers such as *Ritu Kumar* and *Tarun Tahiliani* to name a few, despite their celebrity status within India, have yet to compete fully on a global commercial scale. This has led to the *FDCI* and *LIFW* to actively encourage competitiveness on a global scale by marketing the universality of western norms to allow India to enter into the mainstream – where mainstream is understood to be western (Nagrath 2003: 364) . This promotion of western norms can be seen where *LIFW*, despite remaining focused on the trade element of fashion, its growing success has been due to the showcasing of an increasing number of Indian designers who juxtapose Indian styles with western styles, as well as designers who add a theatrical and social slant to the shows – as seen in western fashion weeks of Paris, New York and London. This western emphasis has enabled the designers to remain competitive and gain recognition with international media and celebrities.

Furthermore, the fashion shows now include the showcasing of global brands and retailers, reinforcing the FDCI's mission to compete globally. Since 2007, the *Wills India Lifestyle Fashion Week* (WILFW) has become the seminal platform for promoting global designers and retailers as well as Indian designers. One area in which the *WILFW* has managed to create a western positioning has been through the increased showcasing of global brand lingerie catwalk shows, for brands such as *La Perla*, *Triumph*, and *Victoria's Secret*. Whilst some research exists on the meanings attached to the showcasing of global and local designs during *LIFW* (Nagrath 2003, Oza 2001), little exists on how the growth of lingerie, a historically western garment, is a reflection of Indian fashion becoming more western or glocal.

Little is known, and has been studied about lingerie in India, and this paper looks at one aspect which embodies some of the complicated meanings attached to lingerie in India; it focuses upon the meanings attached to the wearing of lingerie as assumed by global lingerie brands, and

reflected in global brand lingerie advertising – this is evaluated through the researcher’s preliminary research findings to date, by way of content analysis of global brand lingerie advertising, in the magazines *Femina* and *Vogue India*, between the lingerie growth years of 2004 - 2010.

Lingerie Meanings for Global India

Lingerie in this study signifies delicate underwear, however a precise definition of what constitutes lingerie is subjective to the wearer - underwear that one woman considers to be her finest may be conceived as ordinary everyday underwear by another women – for the purpose of this study, lingerie refers to delicate items of underwear.

The closest study, a study by market researcher Suchitra Sukumar (2007) in her article ‘*The Bra and the Indian Woman’s Notion of Sexuality*’, acknowledges Indian women’s relationship with a brassiere to be one that is:

‘Conscious and unconscious, self-developed and societal, the convenient blend between the individual and the shared... It has its own unspoken code of rights and wrongs, what is accepted and what isn’t. In fact, it is a collection of do’s and don’ts. In a sense, the brassiere is a mirror of the evolving identity of women and their bodies. It is symbolic of their changing self image, their roles in society and their presentation of self in terms of financial independence versus domesticity. Thus, it also acts as a visual symbol of sexuality as seen through the eyes of women and through the male gaze’. (Sukumar 2007: 268 - 269)

Sukumar’s idea of cultivating the self, and fashioning one’s identity through the wearing of a bra, somewhat mirrors similar overreaching themes of: discipline (do’s); punish (don’ts); seizing control (changes in self image and roles in society); being controlled (male gaze); within the public (financial) and private (domestic spheres) as identified by Entwistle (2000); Jantzen et. al (2007) and Amy-Chinn (2006). However, such generalisations and similarities are not definite, as the western studies do not take into account the meanings attached to lingerie in a cross-cultural and collectivist Indian context. Sukumar’s study doesn’t elaborate upon the actual global, social and economical context within which the increasing consumption of lingerie is

taking place. Sukumar does not mention how a historically western garment has come to be increasingly adopted within the Indian woman's wardrobe, and what role westernisation and global marketing has played in her 'evolving identity of woman and her body' (Sukumar 2007: 268 - 269)? Such gaps question the need to look at current global marketing strategies, and to assess whether global lingerie advertising messages embody specific global power processes that reflect an oscillation of control between the local and the global, which embody concepts of Saidian orientalism (Said 1978 [2003]) and Indian otherness.

Unlike existing studies of lingerie, this study relies on Edward Said's (Said 1978 [2003]) 'Orientalism' theory as a foundation to highlight the cultural politics of the meanings attached to lingerie consumption by processes of globalisation. The foundations of Orientalism is that, the Orient was ultimately a political vision of the west, whose structure mis-represented and promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them'). 'Orientalism depended on the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. 'In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which put the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand' (Said 1978: 7). Although, Orientalism focused upon the cultural hegemony produced by visual and written culture, before and after the turn of the 20th century concerning imperialism; the extent to which this positional superiority is still maintained by the west within current material, visual and written culture, in this context namely the domination of western clothing and western brand advertising, is likely to reveal wider social meanings attached to lingerie within a cross cultural Indian context. Said emphasizes the interconnectivity of knowledge and power, arguing that Orientalist discourse is a sign of the power and authority exerted by the West over the Orient, describing this relationship between the Occident and Orient as being one 'of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony (Said 1978: 5)'.

Lingerie from an orientalist perspective questions concept of global competitiveness achieved through the blending of the east and west, as promoted by the *FDCI* and *WLIFW*, as well as challenges the widespread notion of glocalisation, which is the idea of 'hybridization of

universalisation and particularization to create a strategy for the local market' (Robertson 1995), or as sometimes termed '*Think global, act local*' (Keegan 2005). Glocal marketing strategies are implemented frequently through marginal changes such as: changing the language, using a local model or celebrity or changing subtle designs to adhere to cultural sensitivities (Hollensen 2007; Keegan 2005). Glocal messages are somewhat designed to enable agency and resistance from standardized norms. However, a closer look identifies that glocal strategies can be simplistic and fail to shift power to the consumer, supporting what Niessen et al (2003: 13) states as the 'so-called '*homogenized heterogeneity*' where 'difference is appreciated, but it is also characterized and commodified globally through flows of knowledge money and people structured in accordance with relations of power'. Here then, is a resistance to glocalisation as a form of cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1997: 112). Therefore, the possibility that the *FDCI* will be unlikely to identify being caught up within power struggles, or come to know consciously of conforming to ideological western dictates is likely to challenge findings of post-structural thought.

It is therefore useful to look at the current global lingerie advertising messages, which include the most popular showcasing brands at *WILFW*, to indicate how some of the varying degrees of complex hegemony are entangled within the representation of lingerie – adding to the existing body of knowledge on the social meanings of lingerie. Additionally, revealing how these entanglements are conveyed and perpetuated partially through the rhetoric of '*glocalisation*'.

Methodology

Primary research was conducted by means of content analysis for the magazine *Femina* and *Vogue India*, to evaluate how meanings of lingerie were represented and created in Indian fashion magazines during the lingerie growth years 2004 - 2010. *Femina* was chosen for its brand establishment, its highest target readership of professional Indian women, and it being a popular choice for the Indian woman who tends to have a westward outlook but Indian grounding (Femina 2009). *Vogue India* on the other hand, was chosen for less of its Indian grounding, but for its global outlook, and it being the first choice for global lingerie brands to advertise in – as it is entirely foreign owned.

The aim of the content analysis was to methodologically undertake an empirical investigation of the content of advertising, by coding the occurrence of white models and Indian models, and the frequency of such visual elements during the lingerie growth period of 2004 – 2010. The results from the content analysis were used to evaluate two hypotheses. First, that there is likely to be a greater frequency of global lingerie brands appearing from 2007 onwards, as a result of lenient foreign direct investment policies and influx of global brands to India as a result. Secondly, that the frequency of western models being used in global brand lingerie adverts, denotes an indication of the level of orientalism and Indian otherness within global brand lingerie advertising. Content analysis assumes that the coded elements have significance for the function of the communication - i.e. there is a relation between the frequency with which a certain item appears in the text and the intentions of producers and responses of receivers (Dyer 1982). Moreover, advertising images were studied as an initial step; as according to sociologist John Cortese (2004: 83) studying advertising images help understand cultural attitudes about racial minorities, due to mass media being powerful agents of socialization.

On the other hand semioticians argue that content analysis gives no meaning to communication because it only analyses manifest content. Roland Barthes (1968) distinguishes between two levels of content: denotative – the literal or surface meaning of a sign and connotive what the former means. To consider only denotations, it is argued, tells us nothing about communication. A content analysis through an appropriate coding schedule can show to have internal reliability. Therefore, the content analysis is simply an initial research stage within a wider process of primary research that will entail face-to-face qualitative interviewing of Indian women.

Preliminary Findings

Femina: A content analysis of the bi monthly magazine *Femina* between the dates January 2004 – April 2009 was undertaken. A total of 144 magazines, which included: 24 four issues per year, additionally 8 issues of *Femina Girl*; and one extra issues for the year/ months: March 2004; August 2007; January 2008 and July 2008 were content analysed revealing the following preliminary findings :

It was evident, that a significantly greater frequency of white western Eurocentric models in lingerie advertising were used, in comparison to local Eastern / Indian models per page between the dates January 2004 – April 2009; despite *Femina's* market positioning being that of a predominantly Indian outlook. Only the following 7 issues represented an equal number of Indian models to western models: February 15th 2004; April 1st 2004; November 1st 2004; December 1st 2004; May 1st 2005; June 15th 2005; February 28th 2007 and September 26th 2007. And only the following 8 issues represented a greater number of Indian models to western models: December 15th 2004; January 1st 2005; February 15th 2005; May 15th 2005; June 1st 2005; January 1st 2006; April 25th 2007 and November 7th 2007. Notably, not all months included global brand lingerie advertising, and the average number of lingerie advertising per issue was 3. Lingerie advertising or advertorials were not featured in a 21 magazines; however a total 116 magazines out of 144 featured only western models in global brand lingerie advertising. There were no date correlations between when the Indian models were used, and when the western models were used, insinuating that white western models were generally preferred to Indian local models when marketing lingerie.

Vogue India: A content analysis of the monthly magazine *Vogue India* between the dates of its first issue in October 2007 to April 2010, like *Femina*, *Vogue India* revealed a higher frequency of white western Eurocentric models within global brand lingerie advertising. A total 30 issues were content analysed. Unlike *Femina*, *Vogue India* consisted less of actual lingerie brand advertising, and promotion was maintained through product placement within fashion shoots. It can be argued that such representations are strategic given the western brand positioning of *Vogue India*, and its main target readership being Indian women, with a westward outlook. The pages of *Vogue India* are packed with articles on international fashion, international travel and international cuisine, further reflecting the promotion of a western lifestyle, hence only the following 3 issues represented an equal number of Indian models to western models: August 2008; October 2008 and October 2009. And only the following 2 issues represented a greater number of Indian models to western models: April 2009 and April 2010, this was due to fashion shoots specifically dedicated to celebrating Indian beauty; for example 'the dawn of dusk theme' (*Vogue*, April 2010), based on the rise of Indian beauty and dusky skin tones, which lead to the number of Indian models outnumbering the western models for that issue. Like *Femina*, not all

months included global brand lingerie advertising, and the average number of lingerie advertising per issue was 3. Lingerie advertising or advertorials were not featured in a total 13 magazines; however a total of 13 magazines out of 30 featured only western models in global brand lingerie advertising – interestingly reflecting a somewhat more even balance of representation, of Indian and western models in comparison to *Femina* despite its western outlook; hence it is harder to generalise that western models were preferred to Indian local models, when marketing lingerie within *Vogue India*.

Degrees of Orientalism and Indian Otherness

Analysing the denotative frequencies from the content analysis reveals only half the argument. The statistics could be used to argue, that a dominant cultural gaze is manifest within global brand lingerie advertising for *Femina*, and *Vogue India*. As well as hypothetically, that *Vogue India* has had a balanced out ratio between Indian and western models compared to *Femina*, insinuating equal positionality and progress. However, denotations only touch the surface. Looking further at the connotive meanings of global brand lingerie advertising, and taking a semiotic and poststructuralist perspective on looking at the images, reveals developments from Said's original concept of orientalism. Like orientalism which is perpetuated by use of the rhetoric standardization in marketing, it can be argued that gendered perspectives on orientalism, such as *re-orientalism*, *romanticizing* and *self orientalising* are also perpetuated by use of the term '*glocalisation*' in marketing. Glocalisation reveals varying degrees of latent orientalism. It is these varying degrees of orientalism, and the arguable ways of seeing such representations, and the complicated meanings attached to the meanings of lingerie in India which form the discussion for the rest of the paper.

It is the words and actions of *Latent Orientalism* that reveal degrees of orientalism. *Latent Orientalism* refers to what Said defines as 'an almost unconscious (and certainly untouchable) positivity' (Said (2003) [1978]: 206). Although, a critical flaw in Said's orientalist logic, is that, orientalism does not acknowledge the role of women, and how women were involved in Orientalist cultural production, it is the gendered concepts of orientalism argued by scholars such as Lewis (1995) that reveal latent manifestations of orientalism. Lewis (1995) intervenes in

‘debates about the specificity of the female gaze as part of a critical movement that has undercut the potentially unified, and paradigmatically male, colonial subject outlined in Said’s Orientalism in 1978’ (Lewis 1995:3). Lewis ‘argues that women did produce imperialist images, and second, that an analysis of the production and reception of representations by women will develop an understanding of the interdependence of ideologies of race, gender in the colonial discourse of the period’ (Lewis 1995:3). It is in the following image Figure 1, taken from the content analysis on *Vogue India*, that reveals some of the ways that orientalism can be gendered.



Figure 1 Supermodel Fashion Campaign

Source: Vogue India (Feb 2009: 149)

The picture denotes a white model, namely supermodel *Claudia Schiffer*, sitting on a bed, wearing luxury underwear, and getting a pedicure from what is meant to represent an Indian maid. It is the higher position of the supermodel *Claudia Schiffer*, and the lower position of the Indian maid which adheres to and connotes a seemingly orientalist logic – reinforcing Said’s concept of the maintenance of positional superiority of the west through cultural forms. Further to that, similarly to Lewis’s (2005) notion, this image is an example which reinforces the role of women as contributors to orientalist discourse; given that the art direction and consent of such an

image, thus the gatekeeper to this knowledge being disseminated was consented by *Vogue India*'s female editor *Priya Tanna*.

Taking figure 2 for example, the campaign was created to launch the *La Perla* lingerie underwear range in India. An interview with marketing director Jeff Hansen (*Vogue India* 2009) revealed that a careful and adaptive approach was taken by the underwear brand *La Perla* – according to Hansen, it was not ‘just a mere globalised or standardized approach that one would expect from a global luxury fashion brand, but an adaptive one’.



Figure 2: La Perla

Source: *Vogue India* (June 2009)

However, it can be argued that Figure 3 is not an adaptive approach as stated by Jeff Hansen; more so Figure 2 is reflective of a glocalised approach, whereby standard advertising frameworks, such as the use of a white Eurocentric model is used alongside a backdrop of a romanticized (peacock feather, black and gold silken background) eastern local aesthetic. Although glocal strategies are meant to be designed with local cultural sensitivities in mind, glocalisation from an orientalist perspective can be seen to lead to ‘*homogenized heterogeneity*’ (Niessen et al: 5), where:

'Differences are identified, assessed, and appropriated, purportedly with the goal of deciding where Asian dress fits into the global pantheon of clothing configurations. The result, however, is that no matter what form these fashions may take and no matter how praised they may be by fashion elites located in the centers of power, they get defined as somehow lesser than, somehow Other to, and somehow more feminized than their perennial Western foil. As our title, "Re-orienting Fashion" suggests, Asian styles may be re-orienting global fashion, but the very same globalisation processes that have garnered international attention for Asian dress are re-Orientalising Asia and Asians'. (Niessen et al: 5)

For instance taking Figure 2, it can be argued that the way the western model takes centre position of the picture, suggests sexual control and superiority against a makeshift eastern context, 'establishing western superiority by baldly defining Others as unrepentant savages or backward races' (Niessen et al 2003: 8), reinforces orientalist logic, insinuating a need of Western masters to teach Indian women about themselves (Niessen et al 2003: 9).

Furthermore, a classic example (*as seen in Figure 3 below*) of how the rhetoric of glocalisation perpetuates re-orientalism is in the way homogenised heterogeneity is maintained is through the romanticising of local culture.



Figure 3: Playboy Intimates

Source: Femina (July 2008: 179)

Romanticizing is the use of seemingly Indian models in pursuit of an adaptive, culturally sensitive approach, which often rely on white culture's stereotypes, like the fantasy of the black female as wild sexual savage evoked by dark-skinned models posed in natural settings (for example, a jungle) or in ways that suggest their sexual availability (or both). The lingering prevalence of such racist stereotypes in popular culture suggests the purpose of such diverse images is not to raise consciousness about issues of race, class, and gender, but rather to raise profits by appealing to a broader audience, this strategy is referred to as the 'commoditisation of otherness' (Lelwica et al 2009: 29)'.

Although romanticising was used as a widespread glocalisation tactic for global lingerie brands, counter to this, was the evidence of an increasing move away from stereotypical messages, and a growing move towards Indian pride and celebration of Indian beauty, without adhering to romanticised message strategies. Especially within *Vogue India*, who was conscious of its target audience and moved away from stereotypes to maintain an equal positioning in line with western trends.

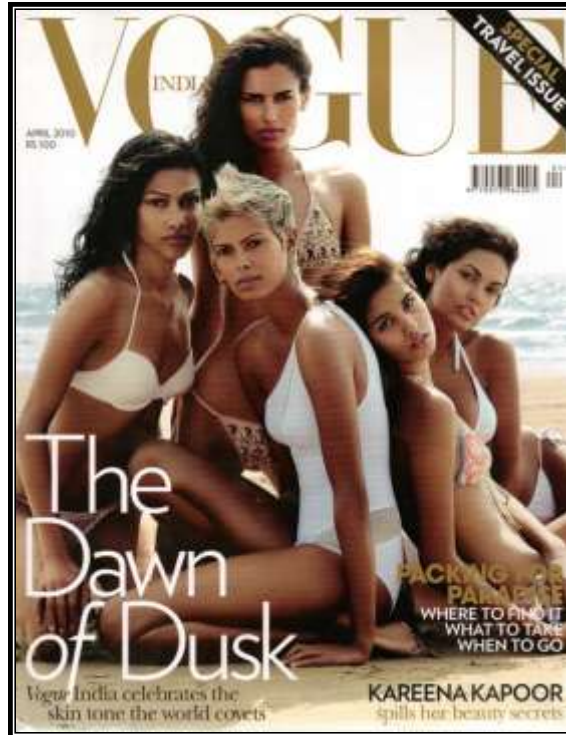


Figure 4: The Dawn of Dusk

Source: Vogue India Cover (April 2010)

It can be argued however, that the consciously glocalised approach in striving to maintain an equal positioning, highlights differences, or what Kondo (1997) deems as Self Orientalising, the idea that the further we mobilise stereotypes of Asian-ness to question difference. Their efforts however rest on a form of Self Orientalising that ultimately re-inscribes difference. As seen in Figure 4 above. The Vogue cover shoot prides itself on Indian beauty, highlighting the ‘*Dawn of Dusk – Vogue India celebrates the skin tone that the world covets*’, yet the aesthetic still remains predominantly western, where the models although diverse icons of womanhood, can be associated with a western fashion industry standard nevertheless. The image, and similar images from the content analysis support Lewis’s (1995) notion that the multiplicity, diversity and incommensurability of possible positioning within Orientalist discourse, contribute to how women can understand themselves as part of an imperial nation and understand themselves as beneficiaries of a structure of systematic differences that: whilst it placed them as superior in the West/East divide of colonialism it also placed them as other and inferior in the gendered divides of European art and society (Lewis 1995: 5) – in this case, it is through the lens of global brand

lingerie advertising, that Indian women can see themselves as part of an imperialising marketing discourse, that limits opportunities to challenge ideological beauty myths of western andocentrism.

Glocalisation as Empowerment

Although the content analysis revealed representations of global lingerie advertising that are reflective of debates pertaining to colonial power struggles, such arguments however, only reveal one side of the argument. To assume that the exclusion of Indian models from lingerie advertising is simply due to orientalist logic, excludes the argument that Euro-American models are strategically used to protect the Indian women (who is often deemed as a symbol of nationalism) from being dishonoured and protected from imperial and western ideals of representation. This is similar to a study done by Rupal Oza (2001) on Indian beauty pageants, which revealed the reluctance towards Indian models taking part in beauty contests as symbolic of maintaining honour (*Izzat*) of the Indian woman. Whilst the discussion on the content analysis assumed that lingerie adverts created women as the spectacle of a western male desire; there is a much needed investigation on whether both Indian men and women make the distinction between women whom they define as legitimate objects of the gaze and those whom they believe should be protected from it. This suggests that the orientalisating gaze's is shaped not just by gender identity (Lewis 1995), but by national identity as well (Derné, Jadwin 2000: 266) – contesting Said's theory (1978 [2003]) that *positional superiority* and power is always western and masculine.

Therefore, a post-structural position is needed to open up multiple opportunities for considering values and variety of perspectives, one that views glocalisation to not always lead to homogenisation of cultural values and identity, but one that argues, that colonialism and commoditisation can lead to symbolic identities being performed under conditions of unequal access to power and resources, which nevertheless constitute to strategic modes of self presentation and power (Entwistle 2000). The complexities of globalisation are more than a mere dichotomy of east and west, but that of one which is complex and fluid, and entangled within power struggles between modernity and tradition, self and other. What is required is a

continuing study specific to the postcolonial Indian context, so to avoid further reductions and cross-cultural comparisons resulting in the colonization of 'third world women' by first world feminist studies. (Mohanty 1991: 344; Spivak 1988: 280), so a degree of agency can be asserted.

In conclusion, global brand lingerie advertising has proved to be a window into the complexities and oppositional praxis of global lingerie advertising. It would be simplistic for marketers to carry on assuming that the meanings attached to lingerie for Indian women would be the same as western studies. What the paper highlights is a requirement for a postcolonial feministic perspective on global marketing. A model of glocalisation based on what Bhabha (1994) said is needed 'a third space' or an 'in-between space'; not the location of singularities or 'originary narratives'.

If knowledge is power, then by seeking knowledge about the complex meanings attached to lingerie consumption, it can be argued that, it is possible to create a marketing model which is congruent with cultural sensitivities that allow new forms of resistance to emerge. If advertising can perpetuate passivity, it can also be utilised to perpetuate agency.

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