Looking westwards: Men in transnational men’s magazine advertising in India

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Abstract
This study examines advertising content of four top-selling Indian editions of transnational men’s lifestyle magazines (Men’s Health India, GQ India, FHM India and Maxim India) to understand how it constructs masculinity for upper-class urban Indian men. Through content analysis of advertisements, the study finds greater presence of international brands and Caucasian models than domestic Indian brands and Indian models. Male models often appear alone and in decorative roles as opposed to professional roles. The study discusses the emergence of class-based glocal masculinity that helps assimilate upper-class Indian men into the global consumer base through shared ideals, goals and values.

Keywords
Content analysis, globalization, consumer culture, India, men’s magazines, masculinity, advertising

‘Hard Muscles Fast!’, ‘Sex Moves You’ll Love’, ‘Beat Any Hangover’, ‘Build Bigger Arms’ and ‘Lose Weight in Your Sleep’ are some phrases surrounding a handsome, hypermuscular, shirtless Indian man displaying his six-pack on the cover of an Indian edition of Men’s Health magazine. Men’s Health is a transnational men’s magazine which was introduced in India in 2006. It is one of several transnational men’s magazines introduced in India after 2005 when the Indian government relaxed its rules regarding foreign direct investment (FDI) in the print media sector, which, unlike television, had been one of the most protected media sectors (Rodrigues, 2010). This opened doors for transnational
magazine companies to enter the Indian market precisely when many of them were experiencing declining sales in their domestic markets. With 100 per cent FDI now allowed in the ‘non-news’ print media category, many well-known Western magazine brands such as *Vogue*, *GQ* and *FHM* entered the Indian market to cater to the interests of urban, English-speaking middle- and upper-class Indians.

It was not long ago that the Indian print ‘mediascape’ (Appadurai, 1996) had a dearth of men’s lifestyle magazines. Most magazines read by men were general-interest magazines or news magazines. The only national magazine aimed at men was *Debonair*, a *Playboy*-like magazine, but in the last decade, several national (*MW, The Man, M*) and transnational (*GQ India, FHM India, Maxim India, Men’s Health India*) men’s lifestyle magazines have entered the Indian market to fulfill the needs of a growing consumer base of urban middle- and upper-class Indian men with disposable income. Nielsen (2013) reports that ‘The urban Indian male has started to take his shopping seriously, and he’s beginning to enjoy the experience. Considering this segment’s purchasing power and impulse buying instincts, the urban Indian male is emerging as a lucrative one for apparel brands’ (para. 1). Not only are urban Indian men becoming an important target market for apparel brands, they are also becoming an important segment for a host of other products ranging from cosmetics to cars (Sharma, 2013), and men’s magazines are becoming one of the important vehicles for carrying the advertisers’ messages.

There is a great deal of research which shows that magazines, and advertising within them, sell more than products: they sell ideas, ideals, dreams and desires, and thus play an important role in shaping consumer and gender identities, and how men and women think, look and behave (Brown, 1981; Garvey, 1996; Hill, 2002; Iqani, 2012; Kimmel, 2005; McCracken, 1993; Millum, 1975; Ohmann, 1996; Pendergast, 2000). They play a central role in the creation and circulation of exemplars of masculinity and femininity for people to emulate, and thus have been considered an important site for studying consumer culture and the social construction of gender (Alexander, 2003; Bordo, 1999; Garvey, 1996; Jackson et al., 2001; Johnson and Prijatel, 2013; Pendergast, 2000). Prior to the 1980s, a great deal of research had examined the construction of femininity in magazines and magazine advertising; since then, media construction of masculinity has also garnered a lot of attention. However, most studies on mediated masculinity have been undertaken in Western English-speaking countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. There are very few studies on mediated masculinity in India in general (Dasgupta and Gokulsing, 2014), and none that have examined the role of men’s lifestyle magazines in the construction of masculinity.

Such magazines, intent on capturing a male audience, are relatively new in India, but magazines generally have been a popular medium in India. A recent survey of Indian audiences notes that Indians spend their ‘quality time’ reading magazines and are most engaged while doing so (Kohli-Khandekar, 2013). They often read to relax and when they are alone. A vast majority, 87 per cent, doesn’t do anything else while reading a magazine, unlike the multitasking which often occurs during other media consumption (Kohli-Khandekar, 2013). Magazines also have the lowest ad avoidance rate compared to newspapers, radio and television (Association of Indian Magazines (AIM), n.d.; Kohli-Khandekar, 2013), which suggests that magazines and the advertising within them can be quite influential.
Thus, this study examines the advertising content of four top-selling local Indian editions of transnational men’s lifestyle magazines (Men’s Health India, GQ India, FHM India and Maxim India) to understand what kind of masculine ideals they are constructing and promoting. Gauntlett (2008) notes that we are surrounded by images of men and women and are bombarded with subtle media messages about gender. This is likely to have an impact on how we as men and women think about ourselves even if the relationship is not straightforward or direct. But with changing times, societal attitudes and media fragmentation and changing media content require newer investigation particularly as ‘role models’ of yesteryears often become outdated, unrelatable and even ‘laughable and embarrassing’ (Gauntlett, 2008: 1). Men’s magazines provide exemplars of masculinity and often introduce the ‘new man’ to its readers, so this study provides an understanding of what kind of ‘new masculinity’ is being introduced through transnational magazines in India.

Connell (2005a: xxiii) writes that transnational media have a ‘strong gender division of labor and powerfully circulate gender meanings through entertainment, advertising and news’, yet there are not enough studies on masculinity formation in the transnational arena. This study fills in this gap in the literature and extends the concept of hegemonic masculinity from local to glocal by examining local editions of global men’s lifestyle magazines, which are essentially hybrids that include global (US and British) and local (Indian) influences.

**Literature review**

**Transnational magazines and global cultural flows**

Transnational media, including magazines, supported by advertising from multinational corporations (MNCs), are said to play an important role in cultural globalization (Appadurai, 1996; Artz and Kamalipour, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999). Transnational media, through investments and joint ventures, create institutional linkages and, through interactions of people, processes and practices, increase transnational information and culture flow (Griffin et al., 1994). As a result, their impact on audiences and culture at large has been a matter of great debate among scholars. Culture and globalization are both complex terms. When put together, as in cultural globalization, these words have come to mean many things: cultural imperialism by Western powers, Americanization, spread of Western culture and values, erosion or displacement of local cultures, commodification of cultural products and cultural homogeneity (a unified global culture).

In the last two decades, the magazine industry has expanded to various parts of the world. *Cosmopolitan* magazine, for example, publishes 61 print magazine editions for circulation in more than 100 countries of the world, and *Elle* is published in 60 countries (Grandpierre, 2013; Zimmerman, 2012). Similarly, in the men’s magazine category, *Men’s Health*, one of the world’s largest men’s lifestyle magazine brands, boasts of 41 editions around the world (Rodale, 2016), *Maxim* sells 11 editions in 64 countries, *FHM* sells in 13 countries, while *GQ* sells in 15 countries. The overseas expansion of the magazine industry has taken place for some of the same reasons corporations expand, such as saturation of the domestic market, opportunity for growth and greater profitability in another country,
economies of scale in production enhanced by communication and other technologies, rise in living standards and increase in disposable income in other countries (IBIS, 2015). And like other corporations, media corporations also have to decide whether to standardize their products or localize it when they move to other countries. Most companies today localize their product to a smaller or larger extent. This has been the case with magazines too.

Most transnational magazines produce local editions of the magazines for a particular country. However, scholars have noted that even though more local editions of global magazines are being produced and circulated, several global strategies and standardized practices that local editions adhere to, such as the selection of the model for the cover and editorial focus (Carr, 2002; Karan and Feng, 2009; Machin and Thornborrow, 2003; Machin and Van Leeuwen, 2004; Nelson and Hye-Jin, 2005), contribute to cultural imperialism and homogenization (Steeves, 1993, 2007). Pugsley (2010) observed that in spite of local ownership and editions, FHM Singapore does not look visibly different from its global counterpart. Studies have also found, for example, that local editions of global magazines deliver more multinational than domestic product advertisements and that they advertised more clothing and accessories (Oh and Frith, 2006). Nelson and Hye-Jin (2007: 64) examined ads in Cosmopolitan magazines in Brazil, China, France, South Korea, Thailand and the United States and found that ‘multinational product ads tend to use standardized strategies and tactics more than domestic product ads’. Shaw and Tan (2014), examining advertisements in popular men’s lifestyle magazines (mostly Western magazine brands) in the United States, China and Taiwan, found that a majority (74.6%) of the models in the ads were Caucasians, followed by Asians and extremely few Africans. Karan and Khoo Cheng Hoon (2007) have also found the prominence of Western models in FHM Singapore.

Given these past studies on transnational magazines, it is possible that in India too, one can expect the following in the local editions of the men’s magazines:

1. Multinational brands will appear more frequently than domestic brands in advertisements of transnational men’s magazines.
2. Clothing and accessories will appear more frequently in transnational men’s magazine advertising than any other product category.
3. American/European-looking models will appear more frequently than Indian models in advertisements of transnational men’s magazines.

Masculinities

Masculinities, a plural term preferred by masculinity scholars, refers to the different kinds of masculinity that exist in a society at a given time. Masculinities are reproduced through many institutional practices, including representations of men’s behaviours and emotions. Even though, at any given time, there are several masculinities in a society, there also exists a dominant form or a few dominant forms, which have been referred to as ‘hegemonic’ masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), ‘traditional’ masculinity (Helgeson, 1995) and ‘dominant’ masculinity (Courtenay, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity is a complex, multidimensional construct, which at its simplest is the idea of
dominance of a certain type of man in society, which is ‘embodied in heterosexual, highly educated, European American men of upper-class economic status’ (Courtenay, 2000: 1388). Thus, gender, race, class and sexual orientation are very much tied to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity fosters and sustains gender differences and power imbalance in society (Connell, 1995, 2005a, 2005b).

Media play a role in the social construction of gender and in the promotion and celebration of hegemonic masculinity, which then reproduces and reinforces naturalness of male and female identities. Society confers considerable power to men who exhibit physical strength, aggression and heterosexuality, and sanctions those who do not exhibit these traits. Studies involving media and gender often reveal that media contribute to hegemony in society by showing limited images, models or exemplars of masculinity and femininity (see Durham and Kellner, 2006). Hegemonic masculinity is often equated with an ideal, and different cultures produce their own versions of masculinity (Beasley, 2008). In India, hegemonic masculinity is based on a wide variety of factors such as class, caste and religion, thus many forms of masculinities exist in society. Analysing the many forms of Indian masculinity is an important and complex issue meriting thorough study, but for the purposes of this study, it is important to discuss one important form of traditional patriarchal masculinity that is celebrated in India and that comes from the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*. I discuss Rama in the context of this study because Rama has a deep cultural significance that goes beyond the religious text and mythology. Rama embodies traditional Indian patriarchal masculinity, which for long has been culturally desired.

Rama, the Hindu god of virtue, is referred to as *maryada purushottam* (the perfect man). Rama is depicted as an obedient son, a caring and protective husband and brother, and an impartial ruler who creates a harmonious and prosperous kingdom. He is soft-spoken, humble, courageous, strong (mentally and physically) and self-sacrificing. Physically, Rama is often depicted in a blue colour representing a dark skin. Much of the discussions around Rama highlight his deeds and virtues, not his looks, unlike Adonis in Greek mythology, whose youth and beauty are the central focus. He embodies the cultural conception of an ‘ideal man’ and thus can help one understand what has changed in India as globalization is intensifying and consumer culture is taking roots in the country. The ideals of masculinity and femininity are changing in India, as it is in many other parts of the world, but it is difficult to know how Indian masculinity is transitioning. One way to observe this can be through the examination of men’s magazines in India. Men’s magazines and advertising within them, as noted before, provide exemplars of masculinity and often introduce the ‘new man’ or the ‘ideal’ to their readers and provide answers to how to be a man and ‘what does it mean to be a man’ (Stern, 2012).

In the paragraphs below, I summarize studies on representation of men focusing on magazines, which have primarily been undertaken in Western countries, namely the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

**Men, magazines and the construction of the masculine ideal in the West**

Masculinity is constructed through various discourses and representations, which include physical appearances, roles, relationships, sexuality and so on. There have been many
Global Media and Communication 13(3)

studies since the 1980s which focus on portrayals of masculinity in the media. These studies highlight that men’s magazine advertising tends to depict hyper-masculine ideology by focusing on violence as manly, callous attitudes towards sex and women, and on danger as exciting (Vokey et al., 2013). They focus on men’s bodies and often show men with low body fat and hyper-muscularity (Alexander, 2003; Cortese, 2008; Frederick et al., 2005; Grieve and Bonneau-Kaya, 2007; Katz, 2003; Kervin, 1990; Kolbe and Albanese, 1996; Labre, 2005; Law and Labre, 2002). Other scholars such as Frank (2014) found a focus on grooming and hairlessness in images of men in men’s lifestyle magazines. Stibbe (2004) observed that the ideal man in Men’s Health magazine is ‘a body builder’, ‘a meat eater’, ‘a beer drinker’, ‘a convenience food eater’, ‘a sexual champion’ and ‘a television watcher’.

In addition to the focus on body and appearance, masculinity is also constructed through male roles. Barthel (1988, 1992) notes that masculinity in advertising is often depicted through the sexual and financial achievements of men while femininity is emphasized through a focus on beauty. Men are often shown in ads for automobiles and watches (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971) and in occupational roles in outdoor settings rather than in nurturing roles (Vigorito and Curry, 1998). While there are many more studies discussing traditional male role portrayals in magazine advertising (see Kolbe and Albanese, 1996, 1997), there are also some that note a slight shift from traditional roles to non-traditional roles for men over the years in the United States (Skelly and Lundstrom, 1981). A similar shift has also been observed in gender-role stereotyping in Indian advertising (see Das, 2000; Nelson and Hye-Jin, 2005). Das (2000) studied a wide variety of Indian magazines from 1987, 1990 and 1994 and noted that Indian males appeared less macho and dominant in Indian advertising than men in Western advertisements. They often appeared in stereotypical male roles, and they seemed to engage in sport and other recreational activities much less than men in Western ads (Das, 2000).

Cross-cultural studies of magazines show a difference in portrayals of men and women in different countries. For example, Wiles and Tjernlund (1991) observe that in US magazines, men and women appear more often in roles that are decorative, and in Swedish magazines, they appear in recreational roles more often. A cross-cultural study of men’s magazine advertising in Taiwan, China and the United States also shows the prominence of decorative male roles, in which men appear solely for their looks (Tan et al., 2013). Tan et al. (2013) examined men’s lifestyle magazines in Taiwan, China and the United States and noted a lack of difference between Chinese, Taiwanese and US ads and the disappearance of the traditional preference for ‘Refined and Sophisticated’ in Chinese and Taiwanese ads. In essence, Tan et al. observed a homogenization in the representation of masculinity in men’s lifestyle magazines in the three countries studied.

In addition to these, there have been studies noting sexual explicitness and interactions between sexes in magazine advertising. Reichert and Carpenter (2004) examined sex in US magazine advertising over a 20-year period (1983–2003) and found an overall increase in sexually suggestive dress and intimate contact. Women in men’s magazine appeared more suggestive than demure, while a greater percentage of men appeared more demure than suggestive. In terms of physical contact, ‘No contact’ between male and female models was found to be greater than simple, intimate and very intimate contact between males and females. McRee and Denham (2006) analysed male images in
men’s magazine advertising and noted a similar result. Men were often shown as ‘aloof and stoic’ and overall appeared less frequently without shirts and thus were not overtly sexualized.

Over the years, the ideal of masculinity in the West has evolved from the ‘traditional man’ to the ‘new lad’ who appeared in magazines such as loaded, FHM and Maxim and defied traditional expectations of masculinity (Rutherford, 2003), to the ‘metrosexual man’ (Coad, 2008; Hall, 2015; Simpson, 1994) who graced the pages of GQ, an urban man with a disposable income who focused on his appearance and was in touch with his ‘feminine side’, to now the ‘spornosexual man’ who is obsessed with sex and the body (Simpson, 2014).

Based on these previous studies on men and masculinity, the following hypotheses are presented:

**H4.** Male models in advertising in Indian editions of transnational men’s magazines are likely to be of (4a) White or fair skin, (4b) hyper-muscular, (4c) hairless (clean-shaven) and (4d) young.

**H5.** Male models are more likely to appear in decorative roles than any other roles.

**H6.** Male models are likely to appear (6a) alone, and with (6b) very little physical contact.

**H7.** Male models are likely to be fully dressed more often than partially dressed or nude.

**Method**

Four top-selling transnational men’s magazines in India were selected for the study: Men’s Health India, GQ India, FHM India and Maxim India. It should be highlighted here that all men’s lifestyle magazines are not the same and that they differ in their focus. For example, Men’s Health focuses more on health and body, and GQ focuses more on style and fashion.

In terms of sampling, Riffe et al. (2005) suggest the best sample for a cross-sectional content analysis for monthly magazines is to examine all the issues for a year. Thus, 12 issues (January–December) of each of the magazines from the year 2013 were examined for the study. A total of 48 magazines were analysed for the study.

The unit of analysis chosen for the study was a full-page advertisement with at least one male model in it. Since male models are the focus of this study, advertisements with only products displayed in them and those with only female models in them were not included.

**Coding categories**

Coding categories for this study were adapted from several previous studies. These studies also provided the operational definitions for the categories used for the study (see details in Appendix 1). The categories and subcategories included product advertised
(brand’s national origin and product category), standards of male attractiveness or masculine traits (body type, model’s nationality, skin colour, age, facial hair, man clothed, male roles), and interpersonal interactions (interaction and physical contact; see Appendix 1).

**Coding procedure**

Two coders were trained for examining the ads. They were familiarized with the content analysis protocol. After that, they were provided with a codebook and practised coding on a few randomly selected ads from the magazines till they became familiar with the process. The coders discussed among themselves and resolved problems and disagreements before the coding process began. When the coders were comfortable performing content analysis, they independently coded the manifest content of the ads and entered the data on an Excel worksheet. The inter-coder reliability was then measured and was found to be high (Riffe et al., 2005) with Cohen’s kappa values ranging between 0.81 and 1 for the variables. Frequency tables, cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were performed to analyse the data.

**Results**

*GQ India* had the highest number of ads (*n* = 512), followed by *Maxim India* (*n* = 196), *Men’s Health* (*n* = 185) and *FHM India* (*n* = 78). Thus, a total of 971 ads were analysed for the study.

The findings of the study show that international or multinational brands appeared more frequently (61%, *n* = 592) than domestic brands (39.2%, *n* = 379) in the sampled magazine advertisements, which supports hypothesis 1.

Clothing and accessories appeared more frequently (50.3%, *n* = 488) than any other product category. The next highest category was the Other category (25.3%, *n* = 244), which included a wide range of products such as hair restoration clinics, bicycles, subscriptions, events and real estate. Electronics (4.0%, *n* = 39), over-the-counter drugs (3.8%, *n* = 37), food and drinks (3.5%, *n* = 34) and cars and motorized vehicles (3.3%, *n* = 32) were the next highest categories advertised. Thus, hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Overall, in the advertisements, American/European-looking models appeared more frequently (48%, *n* = 466) than Indian models (29.9%, *n* = 290). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported. Asian models appeared in 0.4 per cent (*n* = 4) and African-looking models in 1.2 per cent (*n* = 12) of the ads. The ‘other’ category was 20.5 per cent (*n* = 199). This included models whose race and ethnicity was difficult to identify, or ads in which not enough face was visible, or ads that were in black and white. It should be noted that *Men’s Health* India did have more Indian models than European-looking models (Table 1). A chi-square test performed between magazines and model’s race showed statistically significant results: $\chi^2 (6, N=971) = 69.85, p < .01$.

International brands used far more Caucasian models in their ads (79.8%, *n* = 372) as opposed to 20.2 per cent (*n* = 94) domestic brands. Domestic brands, on the other hand, used far more Indian models (75.5%, *n* = 219) than international brands (24.5%, *n* = 71). Both used extremely few Asian- and African-looking models. After combing the cells with fewer than five counts (Asian and African) into the ‘other’ variable, a chi-square test
A chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between national origin of the brands and race of the model. The relationship between the variables was significant, $\chi^2 (2, N=971) = 238.15, p < .01$. International brands were more likely to use Caucasian models, and Indian brands were more likely to use Indian models.

### Standards of attractiveness

The male ideal or standard of attractiveness is often promoted through age, skin colour, hair and body. In terms of skin colour or complexion, fair skin was most prevalent (57.1%, $n=554$); olive skin colour was the next most frequently portrayed (19.5%, $n=189$). Dark skin colour was noted only in 3.2 per cent ($n=31$) of the ads. The ‘other’ category, which included ads in which skin colour was difficult to discern because not enough was visible, or the ads were black and white, or had multiple models, accounted for 20.3 per cent ($n=197$) of the ads. Hypothesis 4a was supported.

In terms of body type, low body fat/not muscular was the highest category noted (44.0%, $n=426$); medium body fat/not muscular (14.3%, $n=139$), low body fat/somewhat muscular (12.8%, $n=124$) and other (17.2%, $n=167$) were the other prominent categories. Medium body fat/somewhat muscular (6.2%, $n=60$), low body fat/very muscular (1.2%, $n=12$), medium body fat/very muscular (2.3%, $n=22$) and high body fat/not muscular (2%, $n=19$) were found to be relatively low. Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

A large portion of the models in the ads were clean-shaven (47.2%, $n=457$), other models had some form of facial hair, for example, goatee and Vandyke (39.6%, $n=384$), and 13.2 per cent ($n=128$) fell in the ‘other’ category, where not enough face was shown in the ad. Hypothesis 4c was supported.

Many of the models were young, in the age group of 25–35 years (45.1%, $n=437$). Those aged 36–55 years appeared in 21.0 per cent ($n=203$), and the ‘other’ category (21.7%, $n=210$) included multiple models of different ages or indeterminate age. Men who were less than 25 years old appeared in only 9.9 per cent ($n=96$) of the ads. It is also important to note that the majority (77.1%, $n=74$) of the models under 25 years were noted in ads for international brands and only 22.9 per cent ($n=22$) of the domestic brands had models who were perceived to be younger than 25 years. Also proportionally, international brands had a much greater number of models over 55 years (91.3%, $n=21$) than did domestic Indian brands (8.7%, $n=2$). A chi-square test
measuring the relationship between the variable of model’s age and brand’s national origin shows a significant relationship, $\chi^2 (4, N=971) = 22.26, p < .01$. Hypothesis 4d was also supported.

In terms of male roles, male models in these transnational men’s magazine advertisements appear in more decorative roles than in other roles. Decorative roles were found in 73.2 per cent ($n=709$) of the ads, recreational in 10.8 per cent ($n=105$), entertaining in 8.7 per cent ($n=84$), familial in 1.8 per cent ($n=17$), occupational/professional in 4.3 per cent ($n=42$) and other in 1.4 per cent ($n=14$). Thus, hypothesis 5 was supported.

Interpersonal interaction was noted through measuring interactions and physical contact. Most men appeared alone in the ads (62.6%, $n=608$). Male–female interaction was noted in 16.5 per cent ($n=161$); male–male interaction was noted in 6.1 per cent ($n=59$); all-male groups were seen in 4.4 per cent ($n=43$) of the ads; one male with more than one female was noted in 1.8 per cent ($n=17$) and one female with more than one male was noted in 1.5 per cent ($n=15$). In terms of physical contact, when more than one person appeared in the ad, no contact was noted in 53.1 per cent ($n=147$). Simple contact such as holding hands was present in 22.4 per cent ($n=62$) of the ads. Intimate contact (kissing, embracing) was noted in 17.7 per cent ($n=49$) and very intimate contact (suggestion of intercourse) was noted in 6.9 per cent ($n=19$) of the ads. Thus, hypotheses 6a and 6b are supported.

Sexual explicitness was found to be quite low: most male models were fully dressed (81.7%, $n=793$). Partially dressed men (13.1%, $n=127$) and nudity (1.2%, $n=12$) were seen in relatively fewer ads. The ‘other’ category (4%, $n=39$) mostly included ads with only headshots. Hypothesis 7 was supported.

**Discussion**

The expansion of American and British men’s lifestyle magazines in India reflects a change in regulation in the Indian media industry as well as a change in the consumer market. The Indian male has become a new lucrative target for global advertisers who can sell expensive luxury brands to these consumers through the construction of a certain look-based and image-based masculinity that they promote through men’s magazines.

**The rise of the aesthetic metrosexual in India**

Men’s magazine advertising is informing and educating its readers – the upper-class, English-speaking, urban male in how to be a ‘new man’. The image that one frequently encounters in the ads is that of a well-dressed metrosexual man who is preoccupied with looking good and exhibiting success and status. The ads focus on what Wickman and Langeland (2013) call the aesthetic metrosexuality, centred on grooming and fashion, as opposed to the erotic, which emphasizes the male body as an object. Even though there were examples of both types of masculinity in the advertising, aesthetic metrosexuality is more pronounced. This ‘new man’ is not macho but stylish; he ‘appears’ rather than ‘acts’, contrary to what Berger (1972) wrote. In his decorative role, he is to be looked at and admired by other men. In focusing on himself, he has been freed from his familial ties to pursue the good life. This of course is a sharp contrast to the traditional Indian
patriarchal masculine ideal that has been defined through familial ties and obligations rather than looks. One can perhaps conclude that in India, Rama is slowly transforming into Adonis and is also becoming more self-absorbed and narcissistic. The promotion of this kind of masculinity no doubt is meant to sell more products, especially clothes and accessories, to men with disposable incomes.

**Homogenizing of the masculine ideal**

The findings of this study show a greater presence of international brands and greater presence of Caucasian men within the Indian editions of transnational men’s magazines, as evident in previous studies undertaken in other Asian countries (see Karan and Khoo Cheng Hoon, 2007; Nelson and Hye-Jin, 2007; Shaw and Tan, 2014; Tan et al., 2013). Advertising revenues, derived more from international brands than local brands, are supporting local editions of transnational men’s magazines. The magazines are also carrying more standardized than localized ads. Global advertisers of premium and luxury brands appear to be targeting similar demographics around the world with similar ads and products. They are also perhaps engaging in global media planning and using local editions of the magazines as vehicles to carry prominent brands to different countries. The standardization of advertisements means standardization of messages including those related to masculinity.

When the findings of this study are put together along with the similar studies on men’s magazines undertaken in East Asian countries, one sees some degree of convergence of masculinity embodied in the form of a metrosexual man who is ideal for selling products. Thus, at this time, if one has to put a single face to global hegemonic masculinity, then it is clear from this and previous studies that the *aesthetic metrosexual* is the exemplar for men in India as well as in other parts of the world.

Men’s magazines, through transfer of technology and practices and through the support of global advertisers who are promoting a Western standard of male beauty, high consumption and lifestyle, can have a homogenizing effect as upper-class men around the world begin to emulate similar styles and ideals of masculinity glamorized through standardized advertising. The study finds that many of the cultural stereotypes related to gender in the West are being transferred to India through the Indian editions of these transnational men’s magazines, such as men appearing ‘aloof and stoic’ (McRae and Denham, 2006), demure, more covered up and less sexually explicit, especially when compared to women (McRae and Denham, 2006; Reichert and Carpenter, 2004).

**Extending hegemonic masculinity from local to glocal**

Hegemonic masculinity has been studied largely in the context of a local culture, but in the era of intensified globalization and expansion of transnational media, it is important to re-examine this concept in a more nuanced way. This approach has been called for by scholars (Beasley, 2008; Messerschmidt, 2016) who recommend going beyond the local to reveal privileging ‘legitimating conceptions of manhood, and of relations between different masculinities in the global/national nexus’ (Beasley, 2008: 86).
Local editions of transnational men’s magazines are cultural spaces where the global and local intersect. They are produced through global–local partnerships and through global guidelines that all local editions have to follow. Thus, they are on one hand local, as they cater to local (Indian) men and, on the other hand, are spaces where global influences are widely evident. They therefore are *glocal* spaces in which hegemonic masculinity and global hierarchies are likely to be at play.

The question that arises is, ‘what kind of hierarchy do we observe in this space?’ The findings of this study show that the kind of masculinity that is promoted in men’s magazine advertising is class-based, race-based and consumption-oriented. This form of masculinity sits at the global–local nexus and serves to assimilate upper-class locals, in this case Indian men with disposable incomes, into a global consumer class through projection of similar goals and ideals. This form of hegemonic masculinity, I would argue, is not very different from traditional patriarchal masculinity as it serves the same purpose of dominance over lower-class men who cannot afford high-end brands and to participate in the global consumer culture.

There is also a hierarchy based on race in this glocal space. One sees Caucasian men at the top of the hierarchy because of their extensive presence in advertising as an ideal for men to emulate, which is rather odd considering that India is ethnically diverse, but not racially diverse in the same way as the United States and Britain. This helps legitimate the power of affluent White men in the glocal as well as global spaces when one considers similar observations made in other Asian countries. At the nexus of global and local, rich White men are the global exemplar of masculinity, and local men, in this case Indian men, are the second, and all others are far below in the hierarchy.

The local part of this hierarchical relationship seems to change based on the countries in which these magazines are sold, for example, Chinese men appear second in the Chinese edition (Shaw and Tan, 2014), but, overall, wealthy White men remain at the top. In relation to this, one must also point out that most models in the advertisements had fair skin, whether they were Western or Indian, despite the fact that most Indian men are dark-skinned. This portrayal helps perpetuate the belief that fair skin is beautiful, something that should be desired not only by women, as it traditionally has been in India, but also by men. Segran (2013) writes,

> While fairness creams were developed to fill a specific demand in the Indian market, the survival of the industry now depends on ensuring that consumers continue to want fair skin. This means perpetuating the belief that fair skin is desirable and that dark skin is a problem to be corrected. (para. 5)

Even though advertisements for skin-lightening creams were non-existent in the magazines, fair skin as an ideal was very much present. A corollary ideal is that of a full head of hair. A large number of ads for hair restoration clinics seem to be there to remind the new man that baldness is a flaw that can and should be fixed.Appearances, the ads seem to claim, is much like the accessories that are also extensively advertised throughout the magazines’ pages. Expensive international brands of clothing and watches fill the pages of transnational men’s magazines, suggesting that success and power can be bought and achieved through consumption of these products.
Hegemonic masculinity has been discussed primarily in the context of the relationship between men and women and the legitimization of subordination of women through various structures. Men’s magazines and advertising within them help reinforce the hierarchical gender relations by showing very few women interacting with men. In this study, only 16.5 per cent of the ads showed men and women interacting, and in the majority of the ads, they appeared alone. This signals that women are not all that important in this space – and perhaps should not be that significant in the successful man’s life overall – which paradoxically echoes and legitimates the ‘traditional’ subordinate social relationship of women.

In conclusion, this first-time study of local editions of transnational men’s lifestyle magazines in India reveals global influences in the construction of a new masculinity in India. It addresses the gap in the literature by focusing on a developing country, rather than developed Western countries, where the majority of the studies on masculinity have been undertaken. It contributes to the theoretical development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and extends it from local to glocal. Local editions of transnational men’s magazines are spaces where the global and the local intersect, but not on equal terms. At this intersection, a particular kind of masculinity and global hierarchy emerges, which places rich White men at the top of the hierarchy and rich local men below them. Women exist in this hierarchical relationship, but merely as objects with which men interact only occasionally. Transnational men’s magazines and the advertising they carry help upper-class Indian men imagine themselves as part of the Western consumer class. Greater homogenization and assimilation with the West is taking place in certain segments of the Indian population, mostly among upper-class Indian men, and men’s magazines are playing a part in this process. In this study, one finds a more complex construction of masculinity that on one end helps assimilate upper-class Indian men into the global consumer class, but at the same time creates a hierarchy that places Western Caucasian men above the locals.

Limitations and future studies

This study is not without limitations. It examines only advertisements in the Indian editions of transnational men’s magazines to discuss the emergence of a new masculinity in India. There is of course the omnipresent Bollywood film industry and Bollywood actors who have a significant influence on how men look, act and behave. So, the findings should not be extended to other forms of popular media. In addition, it should be noted that not all men’s magazines are the same; their targeting and branding strategies are different, and thus, they draw different kinds of advertisers. The number of ads in the magazines also differs; GQ had many more advertisements than other magazines.

Future studies can look at the visual construction of masculinity in men’s magazines in India. They can also examine men’s magazine content beyond advertising and study how masculinity is being imagined and constructed by magazine editors and producers. Audience reception studies can also be undertaken to understand how men receive the messages of the advertisers and magazine producers. In addition, Indian editions of transnational men’s magazines can be compared to local men’s magazines to note the similarities and the differences.
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References


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Appendix 1

Product advertised

Brand’s national origin. Domestic Indian brands, foreign international brands.

Product category (see Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). Clothing, shoes, accessories; food and drink; entertainment/adventure; personal care/hygiene; business technology (Xerox, fax, office equipment); financial/insurance/credit services; cars and motorized vehicles; educational/training/job; pharmaceutical; tourism (travel ads); retailers; over-the-counter (OTC) drugs (pharma); electronics (cell-phone, TV); exercise equipment; cosmetic or beauty products; automotive products or service; games, toys, children’s products; other.

Standards of male attractiveness

Body type (see Law and Labre, 2002). Low body fat/not muscular, low body fat/somewhat muscular, low body fat/very muscular, medium body fat/not muscular, medium body fat/somewhat muscular, medium body fat/very muscular, high body fat/not muscular, high body fat/somewhat muscular.

Model’s nationality. Indian, foreign (Asian, African, European/American), other.

Skin colour. Very light/fair (White), somewhat light (olive/tan), somewhat dark (Brown), other, cannot determine.

Age. Less than 25 years, 25–35 years, 36–55 years, more than 55 years, other.

Facial hair (adapted from Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). Full beard, goatee, Vandyke, mutton chops, tuft below lower lip, clean-shaven, 5 o’clock shadow, not discernible.

Man clothed (see Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). Fully, partially, not at all, other.

Male roles (see Tan et al., 2013). Professional/occupational role, entertaining role (e.g. identifiable movie star), familial role (e.g. father, husband), recreational role (e.g. engaging in swimming, boating), decorative role (e.g. ‘appears solely for looks and lure’), other.

Interpersonal interactions

Interaction. No interaction (single male), male–male, male–female, only male group, one male–more than one female, one female–more than one male, other (adapted from Kolbe and Albanese, 1996; Reichert and Carpenter, 2004).

Physical contact. No contact, simple contact (e.g. holding hands), intimate contact (kissing, embracing), very intimate contact (suggestions of intercourse).