Introduction: A Look into the Spectrum of Advertising in India & Gender-Media-Change Dynamics

Hum bhi karen jo chaahe mann
(translation from Hindi: We should also be able to do what our hearts desire).
Why should boys have all the fun?
(Hero Honda Pleasure, FCB-Ulka 2006)

While promoting "Pleasure", a motor scooter produced by Hero Honda, this slo-gan and its corresponding campaign exemplify possible discussions of gender, media, and change. The visuals, message, and image[1] of the advertisements linked to the campaign present ideas regarding media representation, consumer culture, patterns of class and gender, as well as social change. The campaign was created by the advertising agency FCB-Ulka[2] in 2006 and illustrates choices made by the producers of advertising according to the interplay between the client, a certain brand image, and agency representatives.[3] In this relationship, the producers were employed for their skill-sets and expertise in creating content to influence audien-ces. As such, they suggested phrasing, design, layout, and representational choices and messages. Addressing potential clients, the agency states: "We believe that changing attitudes can be helpful, but changing behaviour is what we're paid to do and has to be the end goal. We believe that asking what appears to be a simple question makes a remarkable difference. So what behaviour do you want to

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[1] I use this distinction in order to describe different levels of communication. Visuals include photos, pictures, text, and design, while the message includes the sales argument or point of view. Imageries convey "pictures painted" without specific descriptions and repre-sent a certain world-view present.

[2] FCB-Ulka Advertising was founded in India in 1961 and is part of the global marketing communications services company Interpublic Group of Companies (IPG). The agency calls itself "the most local global agency network" and has offices in six cities in India (Campaign India 2014; FCB-Ulka no date).

[3] The campaign has been running for over a decade in the form of TV commercials, adver-tisements in print, and billboards nationwide. Although the setting of the visuals changes, the slogan has been similar throughout the campaign.

change?" (FCB-Ulka no date). The desired behavioural change seen in the Hero Honda Pleasure campaign includes addressing attitudes towards gender-segregated fun and encouraging alternate behaviour. The self-proclaimed role of the agency representatives to "change behaviour" in the form of choosing a certain brand and product alongside these reflections thus sets advertising producers at the centre of creating medialised messages[4] with the intent to influence audiences.

Inspired by the Hero Honda Pleasure campaign and other commercial advertisements seemingly also challenging gender norms that I came across in Delhi in 2008, I became interested in the idea of commercial advertising normalising and promoting gender equality. Critique of commercial advertising reproducing sexist patterns while social messages functioned as representative for actions challenging these issues, seemed to collapse the debate on the role of this sort of media in processes of social change. This campaign hence serves as an entry point to this dissertation in which I present the complex intertwining between different types of advertising and social change.

The scope of advertising in India provides immense diverse expressions of medialised communication. With reference to the definition of advertising as stated by the American Marketing Association (AMA), which is commonly referred to in publications for marketing professionals in India (e.g. Gupta 2005, p. 19), I argue that it is essential to conceive of the field of advertising as including commercial and social campaigns:

> Advertising is the placement of announcements and messages in time or space by business firms, non-profit organisations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/or persuade members of a particular target market or audience regarding their products, services, organisations or ideas. (American Marketing Association no date)

As outlined in this definition, the diversity of advertising points to various sites that produce advertisements, e.g. advertising agencies and social organisations. The individuals involved in advertising thus represent various production sites of advertising and illustrate an under-theorised diversity. While the role of advertising and its content in processes of social change has been given grave importance in academia as well as public discourses, a study regarding debates, understanding, and achievability of directing change processes through the

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4 Medialised messages and medialised communication stand for communication produced in the context of and disseminated by media channels and technologies. These terms are aligned with media theories of medialisation that refer to the processes of increasing the presence of media, and the interplay between media and societal patterns. The medialisation theory is discussed further in chapter two.

experiences, ideas, and perspectives of advertising producers is largely missing. The central question I seek to answer in this project is thus phrased as follows:

What are the ideas, perspectives, and debates regarding the interplay between advertising and change, the strategies of communication to direct change processes, and the gendered imagery and social change processes prominent among producers of social and commercial advertising?

In the context of the advertising business[5] in India, and, in particular, in Delhi and Mumbai, this project hence provides new perspectives on media and social change by paying attention to underrepresented voices and perspectives, and enables new insights to be included in discussions of advertising. Central is the understanding of processes of change through advertising producers' perspectives while discussing the dynamics of gender, media, and change.

Contextualising Production Sites of Advertising through the Pleasure Campaign

The gender, media, and change dynamics contained in the Hero Honda Pleasure campaign illustrate necessary aspects of the empirical setting and contextualisation, including realities of systemic patterns,[6] as well as theoretical conceptualisations to cover the complex dimensions of this inquiry in depth.

The advertisements centre young female-coded[7] persons, initially portrayed by the Indian movie celebrity P. Chopra[8] and suggests a discrepancy

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5   I use the term advertising business to refer to all sites of advertising production. The advertising business thus includes not only the advertising industry, largely made up of advertising agencies, but also other advertisement producers, e.g. social organisations.

6   With the term systemic patterns, I refer to institutionalised and socially normalised patterns, e.g. an understanding of gender that is found throughout society, such as political, economic, and social spheres and thus present in bureaucracy, governmental policies, private sector, personal convictions, social connections, structures and norms.

7   I use the term female-coded or male-coded when describing personas in advertisements and other media content. This illustrates medialised messages as a form of communication reflecting a particular understanding of gender. It highlights the choices made in compliance with norms regarding clothing, body, and particular characteristic according to gender.

8   In 2014 Indian movie celebrity A. Bhatt took over as brand ambassador. Throughout this thesis, I abbreviate all first names. This and other language choices concerning gender are explained in the section on positionality.

between 'boys' and 'girls' in their freedom to have fun.[9] Fun is equated with mobility and moving freely and independently in public spaces, while gendered belonging is limiting the mobility of one group of individuals. Accordingly, 'boys' are having all the fun and 'girls' are able to claim fun by investing in the new Hero Honda Pleasure scooter and thereby gaining mobility and freedom. This particular scooter is thus marketed towards young female customers in its product design as well as communicative strategy. With the target group unmistakably thought of as female, it connects to the realisations of "female consumers" as an important target group during liberalisation strategies instated by the late 1980s (Chaudhuri 2014, p. 148).[10] The advertisement thus represents the use of 'gender-marketing' in its production and promotion of products. With the product design accommodating ideas about female customers' needs for a lighter "two-wheeler" through a plastic body and additional "Just4Her showrooms" at sales stores throughout the country with female sales personnel, the aspect of 'gender-marketing' illustrates ideas of gender and specific needs and expectations accordingly adopted into sales and communication strategies (Flocke 2006). The campaign thus illustrates how a specific understanding of gender is utilised in the marketing strategy to reach the target group.[11] It draws on the binary understanding of gender[12] and sexist patterns in the form of differing expectations of needs and mobility as part of discourses regarding gender in India. While it conforms to one, it challenges the other in line with social change debates about empowerment and gender equality.

The visuals, message, and imagery contained in this campaign essentially contribute to a discourse on gender, the concept of women's empowerment, and social change. One could say that this advertisement comments on gender norms in place by challenging specific stereotypical gender roles and gendered divisions.[13] By giving voice to a female-coded character addressing female audiences, the advertisement encourages individuals to demand freedom of mobili-

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9 The categories 'woman' and 'man' as well as 'girl' and 'boy' are throughout presented in single quotation marks.

10 The reference to Chaudhuri (2014) without an initial is always a reference to M. Chaudhuri (2014) and not to A. Chaudhuri (2014).

11 The campaign appeals to assorted female audiences through the use of a variety of attire, e.g. the salwaar kameez, jeans with a white tank top, or sportswear.

12 The binary understanding of gender sorts the existence of gender in twos, i.e. 'men' and 'women', with socially constructed descriptors of male and female, or femininity and masculinity with each their fixed attributes (Ahuja 2017, p. 248).

13 Stereotypes in advertising are used in order to reduce gender categories and thus display what is thought of as typically female or male. Representation of complex identities is simplified and thus a mode of exclusion (Holtz-Bacha 2008, pp. 9–10).

ty for themselves. At the same time, the imagery connects the brand and product to aspirations of financially able 'middle-class' belonging by pointing out what would be possible concerning mobility, freedom, pleasure, and equality if one bought this particular scooter.[14] It thereby connects to the conceptualisation of target audiences similar to campaigns as part of the governmental agenda re-formulated in the 1980s to link 'modernity', consumerism, and social change (Mankekar 1999, pp. 47–48). As such, the campaign latches onto existing changes in society, targeting young female potential customers and building on debates about gender equality as well as economic growth and social mobility. Embedded in discourses regarding media as well as social change, the campaign thus illustrates the linkages between the private sector producing products and offering services, choices made in producing medialised messages, a consumerist culture and aspiration of such, ideas of gender dynamics, and apparent change processes in society, while contributing to discussions about the potential of 'media cultures[15]' to influence societies.

The campaign not only mirrors the discourses present and sheds light on the contextual setting but also points towards circumstances in which advertising producers exist. Their perspectives, in particular, enable insights into concrete discussions regarding advertising as well as extant discourses. In the following, I introduce the chosen fields, arenas, i.e. particular spaces and circumstances of deliberation and production, and individuals that served as the foundation for this project. I explain why the advertising business in India and its producers are of significance and the position of gender and processes of change therein.

Power and Diversity of Advertising in India

Advertising in India is noteworthy due to the industry's expansive growth since the 1990s alongside the extensive presence of social advertising, especial-

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14 The idea of 'middle-classes' contains a range of definitions. Although the financially-abled ideal does not adhere to all belonging to the 'middle-class', it is often connected to groups with growing financial means (compare Ganguly-Scrase 2003). At the same time, it can be used to describe belonging and aspiration in relation to a sense of 'modernity' (Mankekar 1999, p. 9).

15 I borrow the term 'media cultures' to indicate the "complex interactions between particular audiences, their practices of meaning making and use, and specific texts, representations, formats or media […, that] also refers to the interplay of politics, history and finance in the relationships between media producers and texts, ideologies and social contexts" (Banaji 2010, p. 1).

ly following the Emergency in the mid-1970s. These circumstances led to the current scope of this type of medialised communication and a landscape of highly diverse campaigns. Commercial and social campaigns have since saturated daily life, especially in urban settings. Although the interaction with campaigns might differ, each individual is highly likely to be accompanied by advertisements travelling through public spaces, as well as in their homes and workspaces, either through TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, postal flyers or the internet, hardly leaving any space ad-less.[16] This pervasiveness and omnipresence of advertising campaigns, considered by some as clutter or visual pollution, illustrates the more recent intensification and high level of visibility of these medialised messages.

The diversity of advertising is captured by the AMA definition, as seen above. Central to this definition is the dissemination of information initiated by a broad range of institutions. Among them profit driven and state institutions alongside social organisations, pointing towards the conviction held by various groups of the power of persuasion through medialised messages. Advertisements common in India include 1) official announcements from the government in the form of information on political programs from ministries, promoting rules and regulations as for example, improving private water management and following traffic rules, or inviting political participation, 2) promotion of social causes including messages against risky behaviour spreading HIV/AIDS and promoting condom use, informative billboards concerning polio, malaria, and tuberculosis, family planning advertisements, campaigns against female foeticide and drug use, 3) brands selling products and services, and 4) cultural programs by, for example, informing about current TV-shows or movies. Some campaigns are printed in newspapers or magazines, some for public spaces such as bus shelters and road signs, and others are shown on TV or in cinema halls. All come with a set of visuals, messages, and imageries to seek the attention of and communicate with audiences. Reflecting the AMA definition in the article "Reviewing the Concept of Advertising from the Print Media Perspectives", A. T. Jibril (2017) argues that advertising encompasses commercial and non-commercial types of advertisements. Advertising hence includes medialised communication initiated by individuals, public figures, associations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, each with their agenda. As such, all forms of advertising are not only an essential constituent in 'media

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16   Visiting shopping centres, parks, cafes, bookstores, cinema halls, university campuses, markets etc., as well as commuting to and from these locations in traffic, e.g. buses, trains, taxis, bus-stops and changing hubs, besides driving and walking the streets in urban India, one is constantly exposed to advertising.

cultures' but have "become a necessary component of the modern life socially, politically and economically" (Jibril 2017, pp. 1–3). By considering the AMA definition and logic given above, advertising and advertisements will hence throughout refer to medialised messages with a commercial or social objective, but will only be specified if relevant. While this definition enables a broader understanding of advertising, it does not consider the ways these different sectors and objectives can overlap and intertwine. My visits to production sites of advertising in India showed the spectrum of advertising to include complex intersections of production sites. These junctions, for example, create arenas, such as engagement in social activism regarding gender or work for governmental bodies concerned with equality, that contain diverse perspectives based on a variety of backgrounds and affiliations.

The different forms of advertising all contain a strong belief in the media's influential power. Commercial advertising in India, for example, holds an immense financial power: newspapers or magazines are often only commercially viable through commercial advertising, making advertisers themselves the primary customer (Chaudhuri 2001, p. 374).[17] At the same time, the conviction that commercial advertising content is powerful and potentially harmful is persistent and continues to be a focal point. This becomes apparent when looking at different political resolutions concerning the reproduction of stereotypical images and imageries of 'women' in particular. In India, the Indecent Representation of Women Act was passed in 1986 as a response to consumer pressure. It aimed to regulate women's representation in media and advertisements. The incentive to restrict certain female-coded representations, in particular, included voices against female nudity and sexualisation from feminists and the Hindu right alike (Ghosh 1999, p. 236). Due to beliefs about the manipulative power of advertising, commercial advertisements running on the national broadcaster Doordarshan were banned by the female Minister of Information and Broadcasting in April 2001 for being "degrading for women" (Chiochetto 2004, p. 6). At the same time, feminist activists have been strong voices in opposing sexist content in commercial advertising, backed by ethical incentives established by the Advertising Standards Council of India and the India Newspaper Society throughout the 1990s (Pashupati & Sengupta 1996 in Ciochetto 2004, p. 6). For example, an alliance of feminist activists formed a group named the Committee on the Portrayal of Women in Media in 1983, criticising and challenging the

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[17] The influence of commercial advertising on the production of said publications requires the necessity of sales numbers sufficient to promote products. At the same time, the financial input of selling advertising space makes publications able to keep sales prices low (Jeffrey 2000, p. 51).

portrayal of female-coded individuals in media content, and is described as having a significant influence on politics. This group continuously contested female-coded representation in commercial advertising in various publications, but also by means of protests and blackening out campaigns they considered obscene found in public spaces (Sardana 1984, pp. 1–2). While agendas might differ, the representation of 'women' continues to be a widely discussed topic (see, for example, Gahlaut (2003) on the criticism of advertisements for the whitening cream brand Fair & Lovely alongside other brands). More recently, discussions concerning the representation of stereotypical gender imageries consider the portrayal of 'men' and 'women' (Saxena 2017) alongside possibilities of challenging gender norms through advertising. This perspective is exemplified by the Unstereotype Alliance co-convened by UN Women and Unilever, which "aims to tackle how the industry can affect positive cultural change by using the power of advertising to help shape perceptions that reflect realistic, non-biased portrayals of women and men" (Unilever 2017). The attention given to commercial advertising content has largely remained the same since the 1980s. The dynamic between gender and commercial advertising thus holds a significant position in debates on media's role in society in the form of discussions regarding stereotypes and characteristics as well as gender roles and relations or imageries of gender in commercial advertising as potential role models and opportunities. As sociologist M. Chaudhuri (2001) states in a study on the representation of gender in commercial print advertising in India, "within modern advertising, gender is probably the social resource that is used most" (p. 375). This reflects a debate on media content in general that considers media as an influential component in the construction and normalisation of gender patterns and expectations. Commercial advertisements, in particular, provide what Chaudhuri calls a dominant ideology "appearing as the natural, apolitical state of things" (Chaudhuri 2001, p. 375).

Besides this immense focus on representation in commercial advertising, campaigns with social objectives equally reflect the assumed dominance of media content as influential and are persistently used as a prevalent strategy. Especially during the 1970s, social marketing[18] was increasingly utilised for spreading governmental messages (Rajagopal 2011b, p. 1015). The state-led pedagogic objective to educate audiences in India through television, initiated in 1959 as part of the post-independence nation-building project, exemplifies the foundational convic-

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[18] Social marketing refers to the utilisation of marketing strategies in campaigns with social objectives. As advertising functions as one aspect of marketing, medialised messages linked to social marketing are thus termed social advertising. This is explained more thoroughly in chapter one.

tion of 'media cultures' as a useful tool for influencing audiences. Initially promoting specific social ideologies and gradually highlighting consumerist cultures as beneficial in the 1980s and 1990s, advertisements with either commercial or political objectives became almost indistinguishable through representing similar ideas of national identities (Schneider 2006, pp. 823–824). Since the intense spread of social organisations from the 1980s onward, NGOs also consistently contributed with social advertisements as part of their strategies. Hence, social campaigns now take up significant space in the realm of advertising and have increasingly gained attention, for example as part of advertising festivals that reward particular creative strategies alongside commercial advertising.

The pervasiveness and assumed power of advertising in India are mirrored in ongoing debates worldwide. Representation of gender in commercial advertising is not only a popular field of study within the Social Sciences but also subject to an ongoing global debate. Acts passed in India to curtail the sexist influence of commercial advertising correspond to resolutions passed by the Council of Europe in 2007 (Holtz-Bacha 2008, p. 5) and other bans imposed on sexist and discriminatory advertising in European cities such as London and Geneva, some of the most recent being March 2017 in Paris and a ban of gender stereotypical commercial advertisements across the United Kingdom in 2019 (Dearden 2017; Hall 2017; Magra 2017; BBC 2019; Safronova 2019). The significance of globalisation and transnational networks as part of existing change processes is captured by anthropologist W. Mazzarella (2003a), who describes the advertising industry as a "particularly compelling point of mediation between the local and the global, between culture and capital" (p. 3). My empirical inquiry in this specific regional context provides a complex picture of these transnational connections integrated into a specific social and cultural context, and historically produced conditions.

Embedded in the circumstances of the historical context, including reform politics during colonial rule, establishing development strategies after independence, as well as the long tradition of the Women's Movement and other activist groups in India, contribute to the very fabric of the advertising business in India. The post-independence nation-building project, governmental neo-liberal politics, and international development networks connect debates on media's power in India with discourses of global democratisation and networks based on shared values. The involvement of the Indian state, international organisation as the UN and its different sections, as well as regional and transnational NGOs and other social organisations in development programs and projects, not only reflects the range of experiences present but also illustrates a plethora of insights into dealing with or attempting to direct social change. As such, these arenas have established long-lived expertise in engaging with social inequalities and directing change processes. The involvement of the advertising

industry in social advertising, for example through the advertising industry's role in the governmental nation-building project initiated post-independence, as well as its expertise in influencing audiences, contribute to these discourses.

Advertising in India encapsulates societal development regarding economic growth alongside attempts to rectify grave financial and social disparities. The messages contained in advertising thus cover a wide range of objectives that can be seen as contradictory but can also overlap and fuel each other in the form of extensive intertwining. These interlinkages provide a complex environment of debates on the role of media in change processes. This points to current advertising as a complex field of study that prompts concerns for both commercial content and connections to social initiatives for development.

As exemplified by the Hero Honda Pleasure campaign, advertising stands as a concise and strong expression of debates on the role of media in society. The Indian context provides an exceptionally knowledgeable and complex environment for discussing social change and the role of media in change processes. The strong ties between the sectors that regularly engage with each other through areas of overlap and intertwining, including networks in initiative, production and implementation, utilisation of diverse approaches and communication strategies, give way to an interesting field. These relationships and complexities between the sectors are detailed in the following chapters.

Gender as a Fundamental Component in Marketing, Development, and Social Structures

As mentioned, the Hero Honda Pleasure campaign illustrates the importance of gender in sales strategies, for example in the form of 'gender-marketing'. 'Gender-marketing' or gender-based marketing has been utilised with products that stereotypically have been considered for female consumers or male consumers, e.g. cosmetics or so-called sanitary products vs construction tools or aftershave, alongside other products that have been marketed neutrally. While still following a binary understanding of gender, gender-based marketing has found its way to promote more products and services, e.g. razors, shampoo, tea, pens, fitness centres etc., aligning itself with the idea that "women have a different set of demands [than men] and they desire different qualities and features in the products that they buy" (Sekhar, Dash, & Singh 2012, p. 2).[19] This illustrates how 'gender-marketing' has gained ground

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[19] See for example this list of gendered products in "12 Products Marketed to One Gender for No Good Reason" (Tuttle 2016).

among commercial marketing strategies. Similarly, gender is a prime focus in development strategies. Marketing has long been incorporated in social initiatives through social marketing while 'Gender-mainstreaming' is a concept adopted to support the promotion of gender equality following the discussions held at the Beijing Platform for Action from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (UN 2002, p. 1).[20] This concept builds on ideas that gender equality is essential to development in general and stands at the foundation for a range of social and economic objectives such as economic growth (UN 2002, p. 10). The strategy seeks to consider the inequalities experienced according to gender and subsequently adjusts policy and program implementation with these in mind. Gender hence figures as a central topic in the implementation and success of projects and strategies for social change. The importance given to gender as an element in commercial marketing and developmental practices illustrates how gender is considered fundamental and central in the actions and choices made.

In the present study, gender provides the inquiry with a level of concreteness: that is, a visual expression of existing dynamics in different types of advertising, which is also relevant in lived realities. With an understanding of gender as a cultural construct and fundamental social structure, gender represents a category intrinsically linked to debates on the role of media in society (Lünenborg & Maier 2013, p. 26). While representational politics have played a major part in these debates, the role of gender as a fundamental social structure means that the gendered experiences of daily life are highly relevant to the production of advertisements in terms of participation and opportunities. All in all, gender constructions and roles represent an essential component of existing discourses of 'modernity', development and changing social structure. The debates on the role of media in society and media's significance for gendered patterns, in particular, led to gender perspectives functioning as an element and exemplification of social change. Media and gender, therefore, entail a noteworthy juxtaposition (Lünenborg & Maier 2013, pp. 26–35). I consider this juxtaposition through the debates on advertising and social change in India and through the understanding and ideas held by producers of advertising about change processes.

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[20] As described in the UN publication "Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview", this concept situates gender equality at the centre of analyses and policy decisions. Thereby, relevant gender perspectives are given explicit and systematic attention as part of project planning, programme budgets, and institutional structures and processes (UN, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women 2002).

Contributions and Limits of the Academic Debate on the Power of Media's Influence

The influential power connected to media is discussed rigorously in academia, in many cases, with a focus on advertising and social change. A wide range of studies from Social Sciences, including Sociology, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Media and Communication Studies, and Development Studies alongside Marketing, produce numerous analyses of content and/or reception studies. Essentially, a wide range of authors and institutions in India are concerned with the question of what media can and cannot do and how media content influences audiences. Most often, these debates either identify change brought forth by advertisements or are concerned with the obstruction of change due to advertising (Sundaram 2013, pp. 10–11). The impulse to centre effects and impact is consistent (compare Schneider & Gräf 2011, p. 18).

The existing academic debates on advertising in India present a scope of research leaving out important aspects. Firstly, commercial advertising and campaigns in the social sectors are discussed separately, limiting the understanding of advertising, the diversity at hand, and its arenas. The interwoven relations between these sectors are often overlooked, despite acknowledged connections. Secondly, a strong focus on media content, especially in connection with commercial advertising, and on measuring the success of strategies to influence audiences, alongside reception studies as found in research on social advertising, means that scholars rarely consider the production of advertising. The perspectives of the individuals involved, such as employees of advertising agencies or social activists creating campaigns, are, for the most part, omitted from debates on the influence of media content. Publications discussing the role of advertising in society mostly describe its producers as a homogenous group concerning their particular knowledge and responsibility. Thirdly, the change that media brings and/or seeks to bring – and in the case of advertising, determining the effect and impact of advertising campaigns – is at the centre of the debates. A conversation on the understanding of change processes and media practices needs to be included in the field of studying advertising. Researchers' continuous prioritisation of identifying and describing current changes in relation to advertising hence collapses the debate. In light of these trends, I highlight the intertwining of social and commercial arenas of advertising in this project. This, in turn, provides the opportunity to focus on change with diverse perspectives and insights from advertising producers. This group must be considered multi-dimensional and diverse. They are part of societies' changing institutional, cultural, and social patterns as much as the target group and other audiences. A focus on the producers' understanding of change processes and the role of advertising in social change enabled a detailed inquiry into the

extensive experiences and expertise in the production of commercial as well as social advertising, leading to a potent debate on advertising and social change.

Exploring the Perspectives of Diverse Advertising through Producers in Urban Networks

By including academic studies from various disciplines, such as the perspectives of business management and marketing professionals, debates among voices in Social Sciences, as well as perspectives from theories and practices in Development Studies, this study considers the various arenas and discussions relevant to production processes. The contextualisation in India's booming advertising industry and ongoing individual, organisational, and state engagement with social issues in Indian society enriches the debate on media and change with an extensive scope. Urbanities in India and Delhi, in particular, provide the opportunity of an all-encompassing field, reflecting existing change processes and current debates. The city provides political, economic, and – due to urbanisation processes – demographic diversity in close vicinity. It represents a hub of social activism in the form of NGOs, international and other social organisations existing alongside the growing advertising industry found for example in the city of Gurgaon, Haryana, which is connected to Delhi through the Delhi Metro line and resembles a suburb of Delhi, where multiple advertising agencies have sprung up since the 1990s. As such, Delhi, in particular, provides sites of advertisement production that are entrenched in a web of diverse interlinkages between commercial and social incentives.

Besides contributing with rarely-discussed perspectives as mentioned, I chose to engage with individuals involved in the production of advertising campaigns, either social or commercial, in order to accommodate the diverse arenas and debates present in the discussions of advertising and social change. This group represents individuals with special knowledge regarding the production sites of medialised communication that aims to influence audiences and thus enable insights into the processes and circumstances of campaign production. They are in charge and part of the deliberation and choices made, hence embedded in the sphere of discursive politics that develop the exact message and imagery expected to generate change. I hence delve into producers' attitudes and perceptions concerning the processes behind the advertisements and the strategies used. The chosen respondents represent arenas that constitute a multi-sited field providing diverse insights into strategies, approaches, and advertising expression and its relevance to social change. Advertisements with either commercial or social objectives are often created by advertising agency employees in collaboration with the different initiators. These include a range of clients: besides initiators from the pri-

vate sector, there are also NGOs, UN bodies, or governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Women and Child Development. While governmental-initiated campaigns are often the responsibility of the nodal agency Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), which undertakes "multimedia advertising and publicity for various Ministries and Departments of Government of India" (DAVP no date), the DAVP generally allocates the production of governmental advertisements to advertising agencies. As many social organisations produce their campaigns in-house, activists engaging from this perspective are included in the group of individuals considered relevant for this study. With the visuals, messages, and imageries of advertising are results of ideas, ideologies, and logic, the production sites of advertising serve as sites from which to examine debates of discursive truths. The individuals involved in creating advertisements are at the centre of intersections of discourses. Thereby, producers of advertising provide key insights into 'discourses of change'.

'Discourses of Change' as Framework for Understanding Advertising and its Production

I use the term 'discourses of change' to describe an understanding of change processes, including discursive knowledge and debates on how change processes occur while reflecting the complex intertwining at hand. "Discourse is a form of social action that plays a part in producing the social world – including knowledge, identities and social relations – and thereby in maintaining specific social patterns" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 5). I hence frame media's role in relation to social patterns through a lens of discourse that entails a process that creates normative frameworks and align myself with medialisation theories in that media content, channels, and technologies are thought of as essential elements in society's fabric.

Based on the thought of discourses being particular sets of knowledge and particular structures of talking about this knowledge that, in the end, "shape how the world is understood and how things are done" (Rose 2012, p. 136), I argue that the production sites of advertising carry a certain kind of sphere of discourse behind the scenes of any campaign. The assumed power of media and particularly advertising, as part of socialisation processes and reproducing or challenging existing knowledge, establishes media as a strong player in the production of discursive truth. This led me to conceptualise production sites as spheres of knowledge production. The advertising sphere encompasses institutional practices, existing technologies, and servicing logic and is influenced by social and cultural structures. These elements in combination form the foundation for the end product. The imagery, slogans and medialised communication,

all in all, are thus founded in existing discourses and their context, including influences from economic, institutional, cultural and social discursive truths, and function as a visual result of deliberation.

In India, the medialised communication in question mirrors societal changes, the continuous engagement with discrepancies, and the discourses present. While the commercial industry might illustrate and represent economic growth, social advertisements communicate desired behaviour in regard to social change. Advertisements become colourful, creative, and expressive illustrations of existing change and desired change. Framing the collected material and the debates on advertising and change through an in-depth discussion of 'discourses of change' thus encompasses the entanglements present. This entails a discussion beyond what works, what does not, and what the effect is, but rather gains insight into convictions about the interplay between media and change and the understanding of change (Schneider & Gräf 2011, p. 13). Discursive change is seen as social change in that "different social understandings of the world lead to different social actions and therefore the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 5). This theoretical frame provides an understanding of processes and strategies, including possibilities representing discursive struggles and power relations that create normative frameworks. Instead of collapsing the debate on the power of commercial advertising and social change through a focus on its role in reproducing the status quo – as for example sexist patterns – a consideration of the different ways that advertising engages with social change diversifies the perspectives and possibilities of media. The role of the advertising industry in the development agenda as well as the use of advertising in development communication, further highlights considerable entanglements.[21] Just as the advertising industry's role in social change agendas is rarely central in debates regarding social change processes, the content of social marketing campaigns is rarely considered for their role in socialisation processes and solely as a provider of useful information. However, the profound presence of and importance given to social advertising, as well as the involvement of the advertising industry therein, begs for a more nuanced discussion. While considering extant debates and criticism, I therefore focus on the ideas of how advertising engages with social change, including perspectives

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21 Development communication generally describes development work that uses communicative strategies such as information dissemination or educational settings in their initiatives (Hastings & Saren 2003; Waisbord 2001, pp. 29–30). These strategies are, by some, considered the replacement of what was labelled "mass media in modernisation" (Shah 2011, p. 6). This approach will be detailed further in chapter one.

and understanding of processes of change. Change becomes a pliable concept, adjusting to the debate it is embedded in: marketing and consumer interests look towards a change of mind in purchasing decisions, whereas other discussions focus on societal change and/or more specifically, social change. Moreover, this perspective encapsulates the various perspectives that represent the debate on advertising and change and enriches this debate with the existing complexities described above. As the dynamics between consumer cultures, media, and development have become a tight-knit knot, and advertising is central to each aspect, advertising provides diverse levels and perspectives, as well as complex networks in the discussions of the role of media in society. I here thus contribute to fields of media and change by encouraging more attention towards debates on the processes, levels, and arenas of change. The gender perspective therein provides a particularly potent exemplification of social change through considerations for the role of advertising in the normalisation of systemic patterns of gender and efforts to challenge these.

In order to understand the conceptions of change, I analyse ideas, understandings, meanings, perceptions, and realities of the producers of advertising through an interpretive study founded in Cultural and Social Anthropology. I argue that understanding perceptions and attitudes within the advertising industry and social organisations point towards the discursive realities in place. Debates surrounding the creation processes that lie at the basis of creating the medialised messages contain discursive knowledge uncovered through producers' perspectives. An anthropological investigation using semi-structured interviews as well as participant and non-participant observations serves as a tool for examining discussions of change.

On the Necessity of Self-Reflexivity and Positionality

In academic work, and particularly in Regional Studies and Anthropology, constant self-reflexivity is necessary due to the history of anthropological studies being utilised by colonial powers. Self-reflexiveness serves as a tool for critical thinking and enables the questioning of preset ideas. In my own studies, self-reflexivity has played a mandatory role in order to consider power relations between researcher and respondents as well as reflection on my own identity and hence bias (Parameswaran 2001, pp. 69–71).[22] As a white researcher born and raised in northern Europe myself, mostly presenting and identified as

22 In the context of the conversations, I refer to interview partners as respondents to highlight the power relations existing during conversations. While meetings were con-

female, these considerations are essential to question seemingly neutral relationships and avoid the reproduction of power relations or stereotypical representation. As noted in the article "Feminist Media Ethnography in India: Exploring Power, Gender, and Culture in the Field" by R. Parameswaran (2001), the necessity of self-reflexivity in the course of a research project is fundamental. While normalising critical thought towards my own persona is an ongoing project, each project with its particular theme, focus, and individuals involved requires consideration for particular power relations and self-reflexivity. I here hence outline some fundamental aspects of my necessary self-reflection and positionality.

The Importance of Post-Colonial Perspectives

Fundamental in the process of self-reflexivity stand post-colonial perspectives that have challenged the relations between the so-called 'West' and the so-called 'Orient' since E. Said's (1978) discussion in the publication "Orientalism". Therein Said thoroughly critiques the colonial reproduction of stereotypical representation of the "passive Oriental" (Parameswaran 2001, p. 73). This oppressive rhetoric, which was part of legitimising colonial power, carried power relations that are to this day contained in social and political structures, as illustrated by the distinction between the 'developed' and the 'under-developed' or 'developing' countries. Consideration for post-colonial perspectives and critique is hence essential as a student of Regional Studies, and the importance of these debates cannot be overstated. Throughout my academic education, attending universities and engaging with activists in India, but also social bonding while living in Delhi and Varanasi, enabled insights for ongoing learning processes and reconsideration of theoretical systemic structures of power and naturalised images of India and its population in the forms of homogenisations, generalisations, and 'othering' (Mohanty 1988). Realisations of my own privileges continuously spur awareness of shortcomings and remind me that undertaking self-reflexivity must be a continuous journey.[23]

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versational in style and contained commonalities and personal interactions, they were still framed as interviews where I prepared questions, and my counterpart reacted to the input given.

23   My background in Indology (Bachelor of Arts), focussing on India's history and philosophy, introduced me to the writing of Said. It solidified the importance of dealing with my position within this field of study. Studies in International Development and Management (Master of Science) drew on imageries of the poor, disabled, voiceless, and oppressed, equivalent to the naturalised imageries of rural "women with problems" (Par-

In this project, my chosen interest area and focus led to relevant respondents with whom I shared certain commonalities. Individuals I contacted for meetings and interviews primarily belonged to the financially-abled and had a high level of education, such as individuals employed by advertising agencies or engaging with social organisations. This choice was certainly made out of academic relevance, but it also had a practical element in that almost all were educated in English. Apart from language, life experiences and interests, e.g. regarding activism, art, gender, or media content, established a common ground. These commonalities and similar life experiences served as conversation starters. They enabled establishing a relationship with a level of trust but also complicated my reflection on the power dynamic between the researcher and the respondents. My personal background and upbringing exclude the possibility of claiming an "insider" status despite commonalities, and I had to recognise my responsibilities in acknowledging interviews as "hierarchical social interaction" (Lal 1996, p. 186 in Parameswaran 2001, p. 72). The dynamic of commonalities and power relations present demanded my approach of centring conversations as learning opportunities and giving great attention to adjustment according to the needs and interests of respondents. This is discussed in more detail when I address methodology.

Positions and Choices Regarding Gender: Gender as a Spectrum

Similar to how post-colonial perspectives deconstruct Eurocentric notions and divisions along colonial boundaries, critical thinkers in post-modern theories established the perspectives on gender consolidated in this project. My viewpoint is based on the discussions of queer feminism and gender theories laid out by J. Butler (1988).[24] In an essay titled "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Butler argues for the discursiveness of gender and the power of this discourse:

> Regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy and the prevalence of sexual difference as an operative cultural distinction, there is nothing about a binary gender system that is given. […] Gender is what is put on, invaria-

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ameswaran 2001, pp. 73–79). Personal experiences in India throughout continuously challenged preconceived ideas.

[24] Butler contributed with initial ideas of queer feminist perspectives. While criticised for the heavy theoretical position in contrast to perspectives from social activism (Nussbaum 1999), the ideas concerning heteronormativity and the social construct of binaries are indispensable in regard to gender-related topics.

bly, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds (Butler 1988, p. 531).

Following the theorisation of Butler, gender in all its aspects is performative: bodies, gendered expression, and sexuality are all based on this distinction of binary oppositions of male and female. Gender is thus conceptualised as a discursive category that reproduces an understanding of the normative framework of gendered realities in terms of binary oppositions, i.e. 'man'-'women', male-female, masculinity-femininity, as well as heterosexual-homosexual (Ahuja 2017, p. 248). This binary opposition is ultimately established as natural and true through the repetitiveness of performative actions (Butler 1988, p. 526). Consequently, normative codes are used to perform, identify and represent individuals accordingly, connecting specific markers to other codes. What constitutes 'womanhood' and 'manhood' are connected to individual anatomy with specific functions and characteristics.

In the context of a region like India, marked by the presence of colonial powers, the understanding of gender links the binary-centric discourse with the hegemonic power structures of colonialism. As pointed out by N. Ahuja (2017), the dominance of the binary understanding of gender is a colonially imposed structure and "by proposing a binary gender system as the natural basis for dividing men's public, paid labour from women's private, unpaid labour, this system helped define economic pursuits as masculine as opposed to spiritual pursuits and domestic labour, which were seen as feminine" (p. 242). Referring to the article "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles Its Queers" by P. Bachetta (1999), Ahuja describes how the forced binary affected regions with an alternate understanding of gender:

> it often masked the complexity of different gender formations and figured indigenous polygamy, homosexuality, and public nudity as sites of moral failure that required reform. Thus, non-binary gender systems (for example, those that include third genders like the Indian hijra) often faced intensified discrimination under colonial rule, and British and other colonial powers established colonial laws to prohibit homosexuality across their empires (see Bacchetta 1999, p. 159) (Ahuja 2017, p. 248).

My own position regarding gender is aligned with this understanding of the dynamics of gender. Essentially, the discursive truth of the binary understanding of gender undermines the idea of gender existing on a spectrum and excludes various possibilities of trans-identities and individuals situated outside the binary. Discourse on gender as binary has thus eliminated a gendered spectrum, including bodies and gendered expressions that do not fit into this under-

standing. As pointed out in the study "No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy" (Shah, Merchant, Mahajan, & Nevatia 2015) that dives into the experiences of transgender persons in India, "such a binary understanding of gender further acts in conjunction with structures related to race, class, caste and ability to create hierarchies of privilege, giving people unequal access and opportunity to education, livelihood and public spaces" (Shah et al. 2015, p. xxiv).[25] In the context of advertising, the idea of gender existing as a binary opposition is particularly visible. Stereotypical gender imageries are prominent in both commercial advertising and social campaigns. The persistent use of stereotypical representation of gender is paralleled by depictions addressing sexist patterns and, for the large part, reproduces the binary.

In this project, I have adopted particular language choices and details in style to highlight and challenge the reproduction of a binary understanding of gender that makes trans- and non-binary individuals invisible. 1) I use single quotation marks when using terms such as 'girl', 'boy', 'women', and 'man' – except in direct quotes and proper nouns – as a reminder that these terms are regularly used within a binary understanding of gender and are thus understood mainly as synonymous with cis-identities. This excludes trans-, non-binary, and other non-conforming and queer individuals and experiences such as gender-fluidity. The terms female and male, femininity and masculinity are descriptors that belong to the ideas of 'woman' and 'man', 'girl' and 'boy'. They are used as such, excluding other descriptors, e.g. trans-feminine or femme, and trans-masculine that are connected to gender identities beyond the binary. With advertising as a form of communication reflecting behavioural patterns and systems of understanding, and choices made in the creation processes in compliance with stereotypically identified markers and norms of gender, I use the term female- or male-coded when describing bodies and individuals in advertisements. 2) Respondents have been grouped according to specific commonalities, not dependent on gender, so each group comprises multiple respondents. Each group is prescribed a gender-neutral name, and each respondent is thus referred to by the personal pronoun singular 'they' in order to distance myself from gendered signifiers.[26] Chapter three will describe this when introducing the respondents in more detail. 3) Similarly, the first names

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25 The book acknowledges difficulties "in the hegemonic conflation of 'transgender' with the socially visible class of hijras, [where] these other trans* persons and their lived realities are becoming further invisibilised" (Shah et al. 2015, p. xx).

26 Singular 'they' prioritises a gender-neutral language. As conversations with respondents did not include discussing each person's gender belonging, this is a way to eliminate speculations. Similarly, gender-neutral names remove the possibility of assum-

of referenced authors and other individuals are abbreviated throughout, and personal pronouns are omitted to minimise gender assumptions. This highlights my critical position towards the binary understanding of gender and my strong chosen position for understanding gender as a spectrum. In the chapter on methodology, I will discuss these choices further.

Overview and Chapters

Chapter one overviews the historical context, including ideas about media's influential power and usefulness in change processes and the evolving advertising business in India. This secures the understanding of advertising based on the aforementioned definition and the vital role of the advertising business in processes of change in India. A detailed review of the academic debate on advertising and change in India in chapter two follows this. In this chapter, I pay special attention to discussions regarding the advertising business's engagement with social change and the dynamics between advertising and social structures. Based on the trends of extant studies, perspectives, and discussions within the academic debate, identifying particular gaps and shortcomings led to my rationale and research questions. Chapter three encompasses the theoretical framework, and methodological approaches utilised with a specific focus on introducing the chosen respondents. The framework highlights the diversity and interrelations between commercial and social aspects of advertising that are captured through 'discourses of change', i.e. understanding of processes of change. As detailed in chapter four, my analysis and interpretations are divided into three parts. Initially, I outline the intertwining of the social sector and commercial advertising production following the respondents' insights. I present this entanglement along a division between the individual, institutional, and communicative levels. Therein I highlight the individuals' heterogeneity and point towards the diverse skillsets and interests shared across perceived boundaries. Institutional collaborations are not limited to bringing together representatives of these sectors. The institutional network contains individual circumstances of diverse people as well as convergences of different arenas, and thus deliberation processes that led to educational settings and self-reflexivity. These circumstances influence advertising strategies and thus become visible in the chosen content. These interlinkages are present throughout the second part of my analysis, which focuses on the per-

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ing gender and stand in opposition to these assumptions. In no capacity was the intent to minimise the importance for each individual to use and be addressed with their appropriate pronouns.

spectives of respondents. In this part, I interpret these perspectives with consideration for the understanding of change processes, the role of advertising in social change, and the respondents' self-identified role as part of these processes. Conversations regarding what strategies work or the 'politics of change' represent the extant 'discourses of change' in the form of concrete approaches and led to insights of ideas, understanding, and debates of the interplay between advertising and change. Perspectives regarding respondents' background and involvement in advertising, the role of the institutions as part of diverse arenas, as well as the role of media content in processes of change, provide the foundation for discussing 'discourses of change'. Moreover, discourses include reflection on respondents' position in producing medialised messages as powerful while situated within 'media cultures' as opportunities for diverse participation and networks as well as communicative strategies of negotiation of solidarity and power relations. Finally, in the third part, I discuss the ideas and perspectives shared with consideration for the dynamic of gender, media, and change. In conclusion, change processes are portrayed as ongoing processes in which contradictions and negotiations are essential. 'Media cultures' and especially 'new media' in the form of online channels and technologies connect users to the internet and build on extant practices while normalising particular debates on gender and change.

My focus on individuals in the production of media content challenges an understanding of individuals in media as an abstract group of people who are distinct from the rest of the population. By discussing insights and perceptions from these individuals, I disrupt the current tendency to divide commercial sites of advertising from the social sector. Through the respondents' insights and understanding, I contribute to debates on the role of media in societies as well as change processes, and expand on existing ideas about how to influence behaviour. Employees of advertising agencies, as well as staff, volunteers, and activists connected to social organisations, are as much producers of medialised messages as consumers. The specifics of change processes, as understood by the respondents, are in this project fundamental to deconstructing preset notions of what advertising entails and give insights into the complexities of production sites and their people.