

# The Emergence of Brand-Name Capitalism in Late Colonial India: Advertising and the Making of Modern Conjuality

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## Notes on contributor

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*The Emergence of Brand-Name Capitalism in Late Colonial India* is a fascinating history at the intersections of histories of capitalism, advertising, modernity, and colonialism in India. On each of these, Douglas Haynes offers a method and narrative centred on an analysis of press adverts created by advertising professionals for multinational brands, and intended for the Indian middle class of the Bombay Presidency in western India, in the interwar era, 1920s to the early 1940s. Haynes examines a gradual, uneven, friction-laden convergence around an ideology of conjuality in adverts targeting these consumers. The ideology celebrated the private heterosexual family as the foundation of modern society. As Haynes shows, before the late 1920s, multinational companies published adverts designed in Europe and America, which often featured western consumers and reflected western ideals and universalising assumptions. However, over the course of the next decade they relied on advertising experts to adjust their pitches to the perceived cultural priorities of the Indian middle classes. Those tapped into local family imaginaries: the health of children, male provision for the family, and the housewife's domestic responsibility, all of which catered to the family's reproduction. The focus on conjuality fitted the agenda of multinationals, which could not convincingly sell nationalism. It also aligned with middle-class desires for change; women's growing power in household consumption; and the need to create non-hedonic appeals for a class with limited budgets. Professionals learned about needed adaptations to their pitches from local adverts, travel, local employees, shopkeepers, the perceived successes and failures of campaigns, and the rare market survey.

In providing us with this history, Haynes redirects a number of historiographical assumptions. One is that the global consumer economy came to India only in the late twentieth century, while as Haynes shows, its advent was before the 1940s. A second is the focus in

studies of the Indian middle class pre-1940 on idealism, particularly nationalism, education, gender and religious reform. This stands in contrast to the a focus on middle-class materialism and lifestyle in studies of the post-1990 era. Haynes brings materialism to the interwar period and argues for the significant reach of brand consumption despite resistance, small means, bazaar rather than store shopping, and nationalist critiques of consumerism. Third, contra narratives of capitalist universalism and global homogenisation by brand advertising, Haynes emphasises efforts to accommodate local difference through what he wonderfully terms a 'commercial ethnology', which highlighted the role of professional advertisers in studying local customs, habits and beliefs. One fascinating example is the need to change or abandon slogans that could not resonate in India, such as B.O. (body odour).

The first two chapters provide background on the advertising industry and consumers in India, while chapters 3–7 study a number of brands and their interaction with cultural ideals that grew increasingly localised: male tonics and norms of masculinity directed to family life; female health and beauty products, and Indian middle-class domesticity; soap and family hygiene; cooking mediums and family health; and electrical household products, where the greatest friction with norms of western modernity could be found, and uptake remained difficult. To trace change in each chapter, Haynes offers methodologies for critical contextualisation. He examines brand adverts' rhetoric and imagery intended for middle-class Indians, while comparing them to other types: adverts directed to European expatriates in India; adverts for the same brands outside India, say in South Africa or Britain; adverts for different brands; adverts by local Indian firms; and adverts for the same product over time. The method reveals cultural strategies adopted by multinationals. The narrative about their content and change is convincing in its layered complexity, and shows us an industry working in a local historical setting.

The book is in dialogue with a hugely challenging question for historians of advertising, which is shared by their protagonists: how do we know if and how advertising *works*? The iconic saying, 'Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half', attributed to various business giants, still troubles the advertising industry, and advertising scholarship. Haynes's working assumption is that the search for product success drives practice, therefore when advertisers met with resistances, they altered their strategies. It is possible to speculate about additional motivations of advertising experts as a service industry, for example, catering to clients even when their perceptions of success were not clearly correct. But beyond the question of advertising's relationship to business success, advertising also 'works' on the level of capitalist culture, in which Haynes is equally interested. Here, his findings open up additional interpretive directions.

The book highlights friction, understood as the difficulties of the universalising capitalist projects of Europe and North America in their encounter with India. In this context, Haynes reveals that the difficulties focused on the content of adverts rather than the proliferation of brand advertising itself. From this angle, friction in content was perhaps also the oil in the machine of brand culture, which neutralised an environment until it became too obvious to be discussed. For example, Indian nationalist opposition to the western advertising idiom of the modern girl (Chapter 4), apparently did two things at once: it warned advertisers against this imagery and led them to replace it with the housewife, but it also created a public conversation in which adverts could be central to multinationals and nationalist ideologues alike. To take a different example from the chapter, the shift Haynes traces from western to Bombay film stars in adverts, was also apparently dual: it was a localisation that reveals the limits of western imagery, but it was also a mainstreaming of the celebrity culture that adverts promoted. In other words, the agreements that underlay friction reveal continuity beneath change in content. Notably, the effects were on the level of culture, in which advertising became a dominant mediator of modern

middle-class life in India, rather than the functional level of consumption, in which success waver. The chapters on food and electricity in particular show that consumption patterns in these critical areas were hard to change.

On the level of methodology, the historical study of advertising's work, understood in terms of effects on practice and culture, has been struggling with the fact that archives are dominated by the producer side, which has provided us adverts and business records. Haynes's meticulous study of a huge archive of adverts utilises these materials against themselves as it were, as he provides openings into reception history by interpreting resistance. Additional insight may come from direct reception evidence for India, in legal and cultural archives. Haynes's history of resistance in colonial advertising culture is also an invitation for further explorations down this lane.

## Notes on contributor

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**The Social World of the School: Education and Community in Interwar London**, by Hester Barron, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2022, 305 pp., £80 (hardback), ISBN 9781526150752

Anyone who has ever spent time in a school will recognise the notion of the 'social world' of the school, complete with its own customs, traditions, and personalities. What Hester Barron tells us is that in interwar London, the 'social world' of the school extended beyond the inhabitants of the London County Council's triple-deckers, stretching out into the community to include parents, neighbours, inspectors, welfare workers, local employers and more. As others have shown, improvements to the education system were at the forefront of debate about post-First World War reconstruction. Barron suggests that by the interwar period, expectations of state education had also changed, as war service and suffrage reform altered the relationship between individuals and government. Significantly, the interwar years also saw the widespread acceptance of child-centred pedagogies with schools 'increasingly credited with a more formative role in the creation of adult citizens'. A history of London's elementary schools then promises fresh insights into the complex social history of interwar Britain.