

BHARAT DARSHAN

India's largest continuing study of socio-cultural changes. An annual insight mining project by futurbrands consulting

Bharat Darshan unearths the fundamental socio-cultural changes in India. It helps us with sharper strategic thinking on brands.

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BHARAT DARSHAN BAZAR

A Futurebrands Consulting publication

EXPERIENCE
BHARAT
DARSHAN
STRATEGIC PROJECT FOR BUSINESSES

Bharat Darshan is a strategic project for businesses. It discovers unique socio-cultural patterns examining consumers and culture; and creates large opportunities for brands in emerging India. The project provokes newer ways to think and creates compelling solutions for business challenges.

Companies commission Bharat Darshan to:

- Find new growth levers
- New product and revenue ideas
- Shift marketing paradigms
- Develop consumer vision for their future plans
- Create micro-market insights, product and marketing plans
- Build brand roadmaps

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This compilation has been inspired by the experience of our travels across India, undertaken with the ambition of understanding the culture that shapes consumption and the meaning systems that inform brands. Bharat Darshan is Futurebrands' initiative to understand change in India. Every year, the entire office travels across India to spontaneously capture different aspects of the culture. Bharat Darshan is in its third year and over 60 cities & towns have been covered and there have been more than a thousand interactions and hundreds of hours of conversation with people from all walks of life. We have seen and understood people and their lives, because they have shared it with us. Their trust, openness and generous hospitality has made it possible for us to explore their lives and examine what different changes on the landscape really mean. 'In India' is an attempt to share a glimpse of the intriguing observations, patterns and questions that we encountered which made us wonder about the complex set of meaning systems that govern categories and consumers here.

At Futurebrands we believe that culture is the single biggest tutor to understand people and consumption. An understanding of cultural codes and a more pulled out way of framing categories can equip business heads and marketers to develop tools for their brands which are unique and meaningful to create long term equity of their brands in India. Many fortune 500 brands invest in cultural studies continuously to keep alive the ability to think radically about their businesses. This perspective examines consumers and categories in a fundamental way. It may not lead to neatly tied up 'insights' but cultural understanding allows for new principles, new language and new thinking to happen in organizations, leading to dramatic new ways to think about business and brands.

bazaar talk in india

LESSONS FROM
SMALL TOWN INDIA

futurebrands



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bazaar talk in india

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Santosh Desai who conceived Bharat Darshan as an annual event where everybody in Futurebrands travels across India to understand the cultural codes and how they are changing. Bharat Darshan has been in existence for three years and the team has gathered thousands of images, four hundred hours or more of conversations and some valuable nuggets of wisdom. The data was painstakingly analysed by the teams and patiently supervised by Santosh in an annual workshop, usually at a picturesque location in the hills which helped us to bring out the real insights. So a big thanks to everybody at Futurebrands for all the hard work.

The 'In India' series was conceived and edited by Sraboni Bhaduri. Project consultant. Mayank Mansingh Kaul help was invaluable in refining and coming up with this unique format. Simrat and Avantika of Ferris wheel design walked the final mile with us and their grasp of the content coupled with great design sense has given shape to this series.

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Design: ferris wheel design

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Communicating through signage in India has its own unique character. Naming a shop is often not simply about indicating what goods and services are on offer or about who owns it.

In a country of 1.27 billion with crowded bazaars to match the number, everybody has to try harder to connect with the consumer.

There are some innovative ways to evoke the deepest desire, conjure up a world, provide quality assurance or to simply explain clearly what is being sold. The people who do business here know a couple of things about the way their customers think and what hooks their fantasies.





A GOOD PRICE POINT NEEDS NOTHING ELSE

A good bargain appeals to the heart in a way that it leaves nothing else to be desired. *Just a simple formula—what is it and how much does it cost.* In the face of a good price point, brand takes a back seat.

The Indian consumer is a conqueror. The market place is the battlefield where the riches of the land have to be hunted down and carted home.

The market responds to the hunting instinct by becoming an ally. It speaks to this fantasy in terms of deals beyond the rational. ■■



THE NO FRILLS COMMUNICATION: MATTER OF FACT SELLING

For necessities there is little need to try hard. In the sun, the parched throat does not need a hard sell. The interaction is very transactional. There is a very functional display of goods and prices attached. Clarity is the only deliverable of the communication.





CHINA BAZAARS

are the equivalent of dollar/pound stores which are fixed price stores with unbranded items that sell on the promise that nothing inside the store is over a certain price. What is interesting is the leveraging of the 'Made in China' association, which lends credibility to the fact that everything over here is a deal.



Khana peena—simple functionality of a restaurant. It aims to deliver food to those who are looking for a meal which is conveniently located, at a good price and tastes reasonably good. It needs to be a honest deal and nothing else. ■■



ILLUSTRATING THE POINT



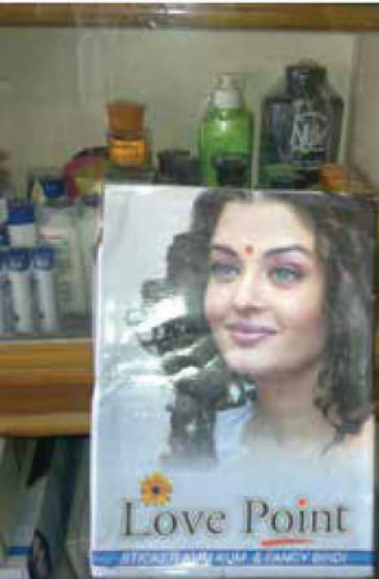
Simplicity and clarity is the key to efficient communication. Stating it with words, and then underlining it with illustrations, ensures that there is no leakage in transmission. This kind of communication always finds its target. Even if the words are linear in stating the purpose, the visuals are an opportunity to hook the imagination and bring the promise alive. Playing with bold fonts in a way that it leaps out at the passerby, is unparalleled in its impact. This is a simple formula, which has been used to tell fairy tales for ages in a culture that is oral and visual in nature.

When comprehension is more important than emotional connect

When there is a discerning understanding that a clear need is being addressed, the communication aims to catch the eye and state clearly what is being sold. There is no need to over reach with aesthetics or emotional connect. ■■



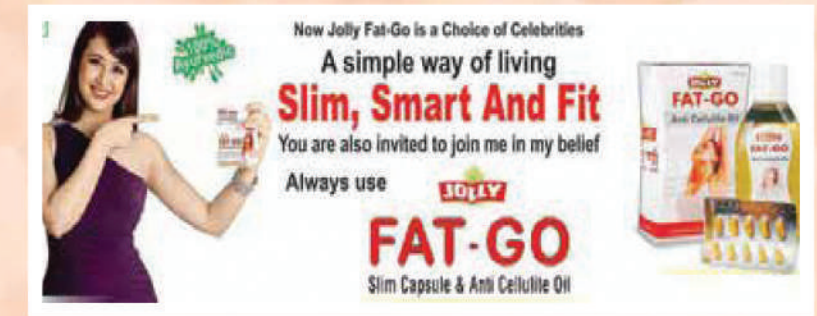
Simplicity of the communication is not only about keeping the clutter out, but about keeping a clear focus. This zeroing in is based on an astute understanding of what the customer walking past wants to know and what he really cares about. The quality of the visuals might not be great but they do the job of communicating in a language neutral way. ■■



WHAT IS IN A NAME?

Popular brands have been built on a simple statement of the benefit of the product. The category, use and delivery are all included in the name, in a way that is self explanatory. The connection is sharp and it gets to the heart of the matter without any delay.

None of these brands require any explanation. It begins with an advantage because it taps into the fantasy of what the consumer wishes it would achieve. The emotional tone of the fantasy is captured in a beautifully concise way. When it comes to excess fat, don't you wish it would just 'go?'



BRAND TALK

'Wet'n' wild indicates that it is a water based theme park, away from the city where you can let your hair down. 'Wild' conjures up imagery which is unambiguously inviting for a weekend getaway.



mehtakyakehta.com



wahjiwahonline.com

A food brand that appropriates key forms of appreciation and the cultural code of hospitality, squeezes out more brand promise than would otherwise be possible.

Fonts that pack in a punch

Like pop up books, it makes the scene come alive. The 3D effect font delivers a punch, made popular by Bollywood hoardings. ■■



Deconstructing the principles

Truck art has been made popular for those who seek 'quaint India.' For the western world, this has become easily identifiable as Indian. The colors are vibrant, there is a lot of detailing, the font is bold and it uses depth perception to come closer to the viewer.

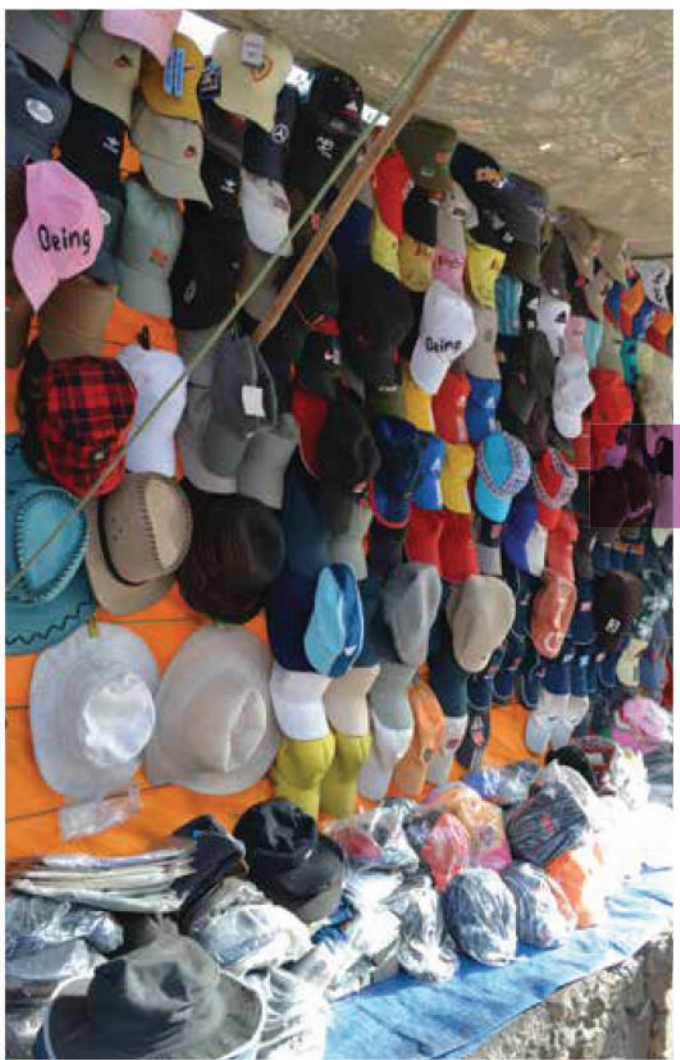
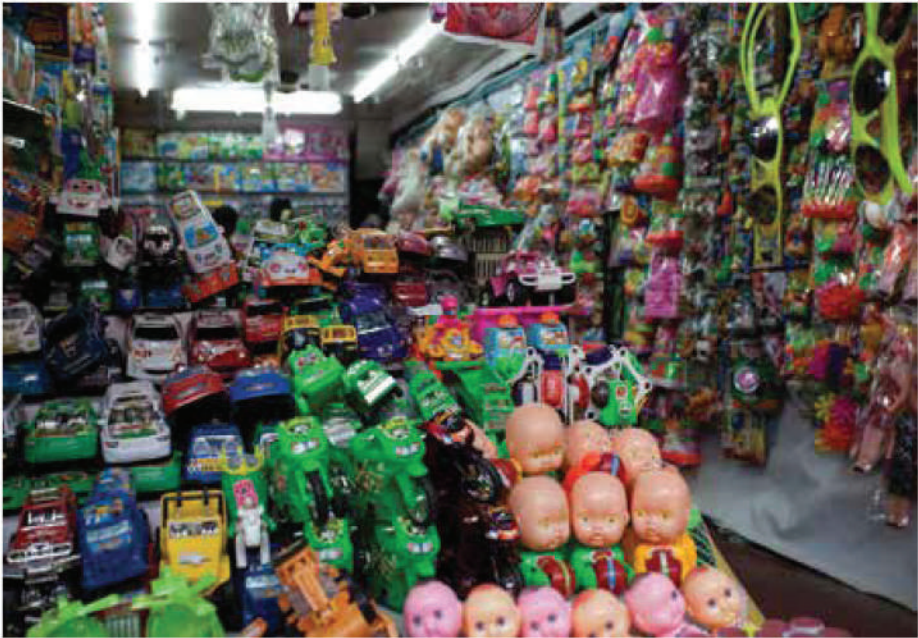
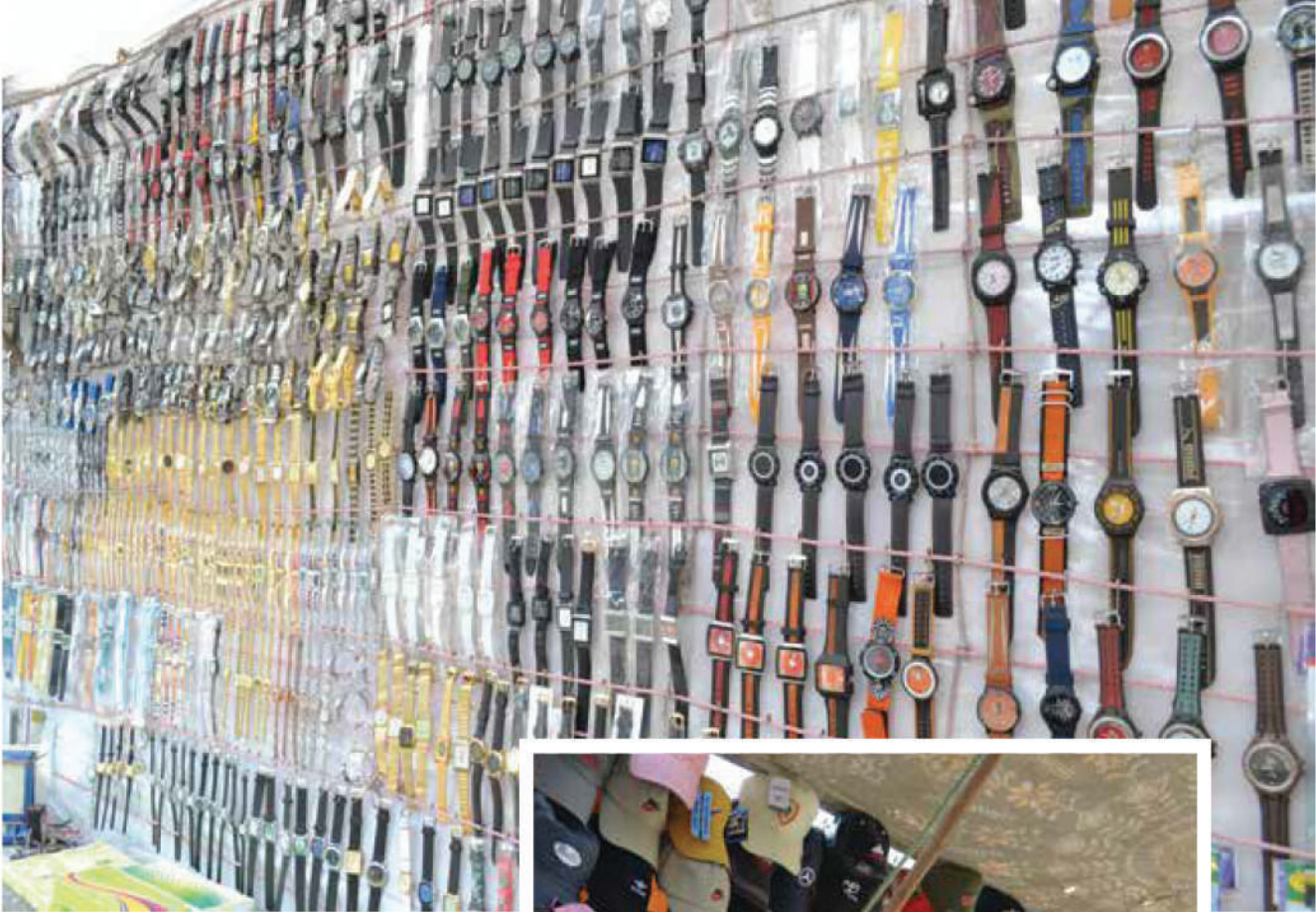
It is much like a 3D film and wherever possible it has Bollywood stars. ■■





... and there has to be abundance on display

Shops are about plenty. Displays emphasize abundance. Traditional displays believe in putting almost the whole inventory out there. The fantasy around the bazaar is one of unimaginable scale and a wonderland where anything your heart desires can be bought and everything on any wish list can be found there. Displays like this elevate the idea of 'choice' to nearly mythic proportions. ■■



A bundance is further underlined by use of phrases that convey un ending supply of goods and displays that give a sense of stretching to infinity. ■■



If the garment is available in six colors, it would be a missed opportunity not to display it



Stringing up displays at eye level

Mannequins, often abridged versions of them are strung up outside the shop where they are visible to anyone walking through the bazaar. Displays will always strive to step outside the shop and stay at least a few inches of the shop next door. ■■







THE DREAM WORDS

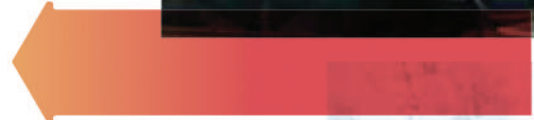
Sharp zoning in to the ‘big dream’ using just one or two words, reveals how well the dominant fantasy around the category or service is understood. Clever play on placement, size of the font displays the precision with which the big motivation is sorted from the supporting elements. There is an insider’s understanding of what is the ‘real’ end benefit being sought, which often subverts any linear deduction.

Settling in foreign country fantasy

Getting a visa to UK is the big dream. 'Daily' indicates abundance, which assures the crowds that they too have a good chance of getting one. ■■



There is an understanding that the big news is 'visa' and not education.

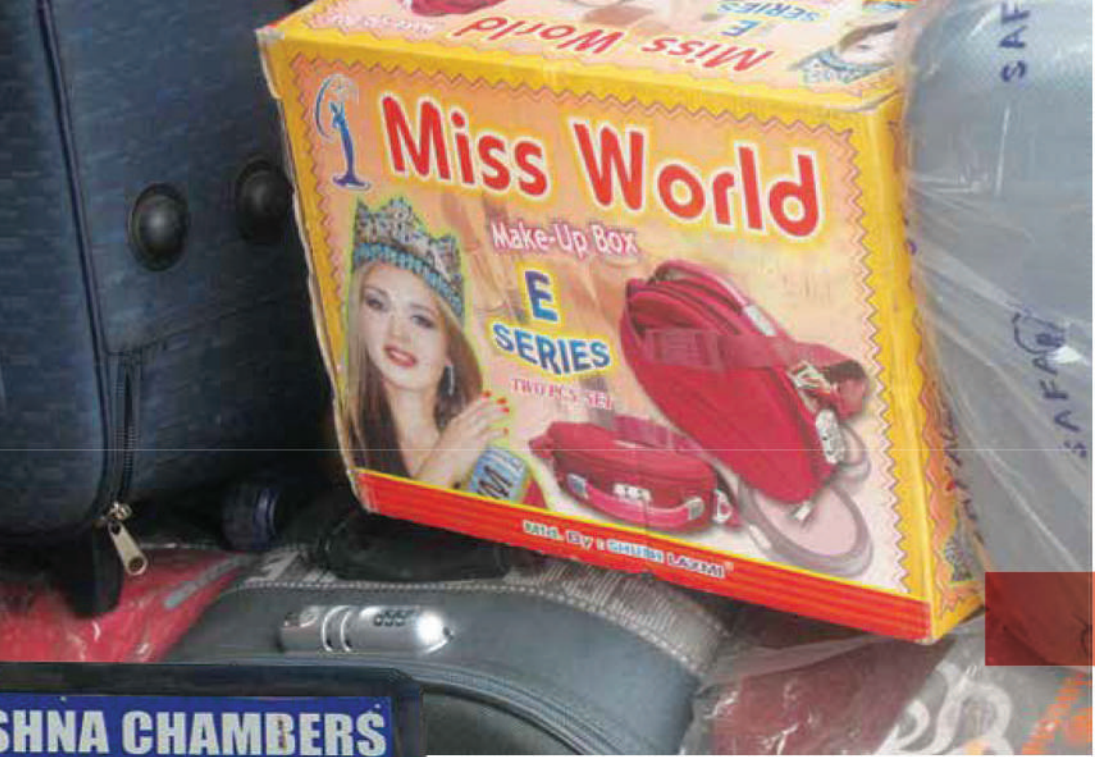


Finding the Perfect match fantasy

The shabbiness of this marriage bureau does not take away from this promise. ■■

The most beautiful girl in the world fantasy

A make up kit that closes the distance with a touch of foundation and some eye shadow.



The make over fantasy

'Glamour' is democratic now. It is within the reach of anyone who tries. The most manifested form of it is the air hostess phenomenon. Transformation is perhaps the real pay off.



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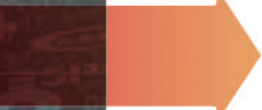


The no holds barred shopping trip

‘**B**indass’ Shopping without restraint in an up market mall is a fantasy that is as universal as being really rich one day. ■■



A wild shopping spree is bound to be memorable.



Finally meeting Mickey Mouse fantasy

Disneyland is the epitome of what every leisure park wishes to be. Bringing this fantasy close to home in the local fair ground is where the magic lies. ■■



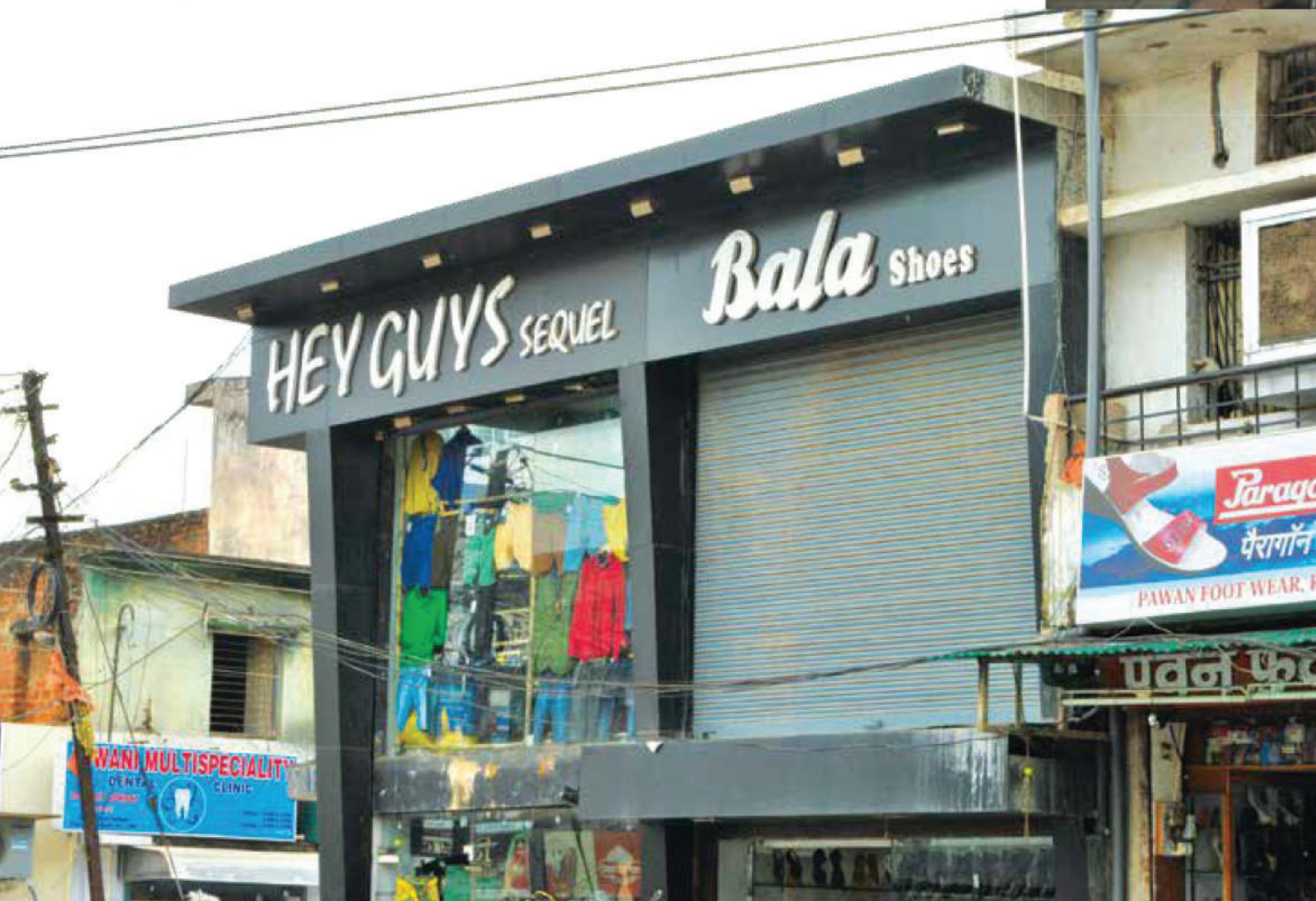
Celebrity fantasy

Bollywood has always fired the popular imagination. Going to Mumbai to become a star is a mythic journey which rescues ordinariness. It lends aura and sparkle to the mundane. References to Bollywood or to the high life make an appearance, giving us a glimpse of what lies behind the weary exterior. ■■

References to popular serials is another way of appropriating the emotional territory associated with it.

'Roadies' is a popular biking based reality show. This name ends up communicating quite efficiently that this a hangout for young boys.

References to popular film songs, or using film vocabulary contains the sub text of placing the consumer within his silver screen fantasy, which has a strong cultural presence. ■■





MODERNITY: THE FASHION VOCABULARY

Fashion is experienced as an imperative of the times we are living in. Interfacing with it demands a different vocabulary because there is no equivalent word for fashion in the native tongue. It is a western notion. Therefore English words need to be adopted, but the feeling around it, captured in the choice of words, is telling. Ambivalence surrounds both modernity & fashion as one spawns the other. They are both experienced as desirable, intimidating and speckled with disapproval and mocking a motivation that sees the self in grand terms.

Hi Fi

Used to describe somebody who thinks they are too good to mingle with the hoi polloi. There seems to be an implicit disapproval in what is being sold as high fashion.

Fashion has been coaxed out by time. The ambivalence around fashion is reflected in the need to clarify that it can be respectable even though it is a product of the times we live in. ■■



Fancy

A term that connotes variants that are not everyday and are therefore high end occasion wear. Fancy implicitly indicates that it is not of peasant stock and choosing it indicates a certain amount of grandiosity being indulged. ■■



Ephemeral nature of fashion requires that the durability of the goods be underlined. The mental model of fashion is such that functionality assumes a position at the opposite end of the spectrum.



'Paris' or 'big shot' seem to de-fang any glamour that high fashion may seek to communicate. It seems to be inadvertently mocking the fashion fantasy, perhaps due to sheer incomprehension of this narrative. ■■

Showstopper: The rightful outcome when you are well dressed



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MODERNITY: PHRASES THAT LIFT THE STATUS INSTANTLY

Some phrases have been in circulation for very long. The phenomenon of the 'shoppee' is rather widespread. Though shoppee is the old english word for shop, here it indicates that it is a notch above the ordinary.

Corner

Corner is another such word that seeks to elevate the humble street corner shop. Visuals of movie stars make up for any lack of glamour. ■■



chicken
corner



Your Corner Cafe

Parlour and Paradise

Parlour and paradise are words that indicate foreignness of the offer, which is both alien and attractive at the same time. ■■



'Ghar' just has to try harder to match up in a milieu where English words lift the glamour quotient



➔ SPEAKING WITH EMPATHY

Being culturally clued in means being able to identify what are the real pain points and will be the solution. These are insights that only insiders can have. This speaks in the kind of tone that only family members can assume. It redefines what identifying 'need gap' means.

Sending a child away from home or preparing for the tough business of making money are extremely emotionally loaded times. The terms of assurance and empathy establish a sense of closeness and insider understanding which is so persuasive.

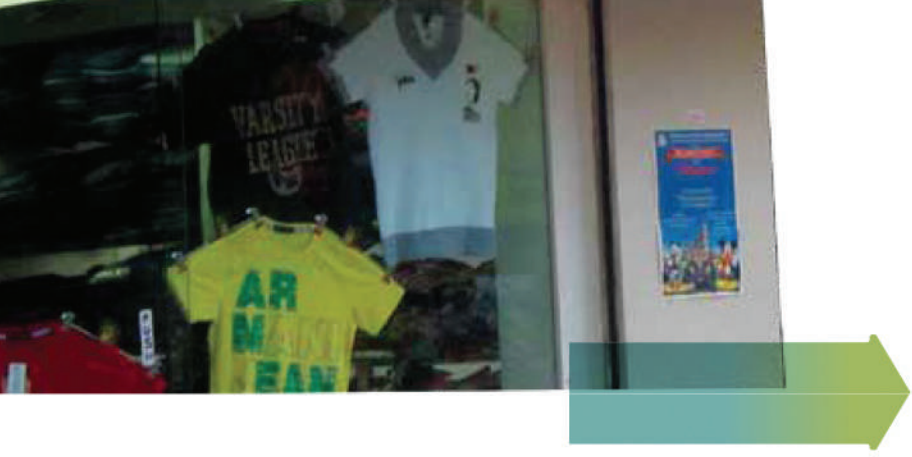
Names which reflect an astute understanding of the biggest concerns and are articulated and addressed even before the consumer expresses it. It communicates an assurance that he is talking to one of his own who knows that when he is buying clothes, staying within the budget is his main concern. ■■



A food delivery service knows that its biggest benefits is rescuing from the bother or jhanjhat of the kitchen.

‘M en’s boutique is a foray into the unfamiliar territory of fashion usually reserved for woman. For the slightly defensive fashion initiate, it helps to know that somebody is firmly on their side.

Most often it is the man who goes shopping for the women. These speak to his range of experiences of the women he is buying for. There is empathy for the fact that he is bewildered by the choices and it is a fussy bunch that he is dealing with. This is the cultural insider talking. ■■



The General store phenomenon

Only an insider could do this. Every neighbourhood has one. The 'General store' thrives on an intimate knowledge of the local population. It stocks a very disparate and odd mix of items which range from tennis balls to mouse traps. What unites this inventory mix is that these items find takers in that catchment area. These are things which are required either on a regular basis or odd things which are required urgently and are crucial enough to bring life to a stand still. The general store always has its ear to the ground. This business is about anticipating and being vigilant about changing needs. It is about being involved in the lives of the customers. The general store knows what is prepared on which festivals and what the ingredients are. He knows that in summer, there are visiting grandchildren and in winter a particular brand of body oil sells well. His inventory mix is judicious and dynamic and only the nimble footed thrive.





MODERNITY: THE DIGITAL VOCABULARY

Fashion is a product of the times and the youth are the primary audience for this. When these two things are put together, the digital vocabulary is expected to be the connecting bridge. This vocabulary thrown at any product or enterprise modernizes it and shouts 'youth' from the roof top.

This chaat wala has appropriated every social networking site and added BBM for good measure

3D coaching technology, 'Digital Classrooms' adds more credibility to the 'World School' claim. ■■



<http://gripewhine.files.wordpress.com>







EVOKING THE WORLD IN MIND

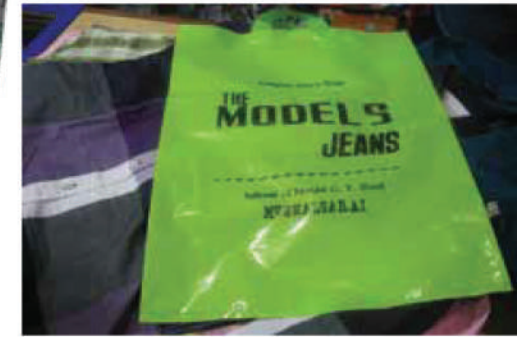
There is a clever, covert way to allude to the world of associated benefits. This is the way to work around what may not be socially approved, but nevertheless, **it is the secret fantasy**. It also works to elevate the product at hand to another level where the ordinary can puff up and claim the higher order reasons for being. **It opens up the meaning system around the category, and brands are created when an evocative meaning is tapped into.**

Denim's ability to hike up the hotness quotient is something the Indian audience secretly desires, but can't express it overtly like a Calvin Klein. The sexual quotient is multiplied by a censor board 'A certificate.' and a name like Jeanpur Heat Bazar'. Borrowing a symbol from commonly understood film experience shows a clever appreciation of this world.



Camp is the illustrative word... conjures up the out doorsy, rough, masculine world of denim.

JEANS CAMP
Shirt, T,Shirt, Jaket,
Trak Suit, Top,
Jocky., Air Bag,
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'Night Flight' evokes the fact that the night club for the small town person is a space that is at a certain distance from the social milieu.



French way of rejuvenation - spa clearly is not native.



Mandir: divine origins of water



➡ ASSURANCE

What will provide assurance that the product or service is reliable and best in class, requires an astute understanding of what is culturally believed to be the expertise or factor that lies at the heart of it. Credentials may draw from country of origin, a name that is well established in that field or cultural stereotypes associated with a particular expertise. Understanding the underlying mental model is the key.

Assurance of educational credentials

M-tech alludes to the fact that the level of expertise here is not of a mere technician but that of an engineer. ■■



Assurance of 'Imported'

Gulf is the short hand for Imported, therefore can claim to rise above the ordinary and be 'fancy'. ■■



Assurance of stereotypes

Cultural archetypes of who is credited with that expertise. For education a particular Guru's name is important and for tattoos somebody by the name of Nick is more appropriate than a Sharma or Chaturvedi. ■■



Assurance of heritage

Old players have a brand leverage that new players can never match. Expertise can only be handed down the generation, is a belief that finds resonance with a deterministic worldview. 'XY & Sons' or 'XY & grandsons' is a weighty thing to put on the board. ■■



BRAND TALK

Categories that have high value or significance such as gold, food or education are some of the categories where trust can be built by 'heritage'.

If it has been trusted by the forefathers, there is likely to be no risk in carrying on with this practice



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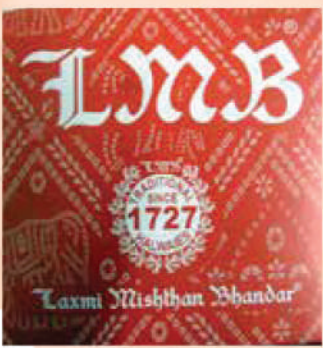
Assurance of a name

Reputation is zealously guarded and proudly proclaimed. Businesses are built on the credibility and equity that the individual commands. Brands are not just abstractions. Sometimes they are just real people and they have something real to offer. ■■



BRAND TALK

Words like 'since' and 'established in' are signifiers of 'heritage.' Brands that have stood the test of time have equity which can withstand harsh evaluation of food critics



www.tripadvisor.in



www.nathusweetsynr.com





SOMETIMES BRANDED JUST MEANS THAT IT DOES NOT WANT TO BE COMMODITY

‘Branded’ is an umbrella term without much specificity. There are very few sharp identities. The real and the fake sometimes have very little distance between them. Knock off of well known brands reveals what is the key operative element of that brand or category. The way the associations are created reveals what a brand in that category means

Branded

Branded elevates above the ordinary. Migrating to 'branded' points to a certain amount of discernment and fussiness about what is acceptable. It means that the bar has been set high. It speaks to a customer who knows and will not be seen in just anything. ■■

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Logos are beautiful and coveted. They are good enough to be turned into jewelry and serve as embellishment regardless of accuracy and can effortlessly cross category lines


Brand names are mixed and matched. The overall idea is to communicate the class that one belongs to. It preys rather democratically on established brands. However, there is not much specificity. The nature of the borrowing reveals what the meaning structure of the brand really is in people's head. ■■



Borrowing from the meaning structure, is not limited to brands in that category. Apparel can reference the logo of a mobile brand to simply communicate that the sale packs in a punch. To multiply the impact Bollywood or even Hollywood can always be called upon. Films are open source meaning systems which offer a wide variety of codes that can be called upon and they are universally understood.

The worlds of 'Friends' and KFC can be conflated. Somewhere in the mind they are from the same world. Somewhere 'chicken' and 'Singh' can form the local bridge to that world. ■■





The lessons that we learnt as we walked around scores of markets in India, gave us a peek into the insider knowledge that the unbranded world uses to connect with the consumer. This is the voice that speaks from within their world. This is the cultural knowledge base that allows the local entrepreneur to nimbly identify and respond to gaps in the market.

Astute understanding of the cultural mental models of categories and motivations gets to the heart of the matter. The apparent lack of refinement and what the English speaking world would consider comical blunders, doesn't dent the communication. The connect is strong and often it is the branded world that is ruthlessly exploited.