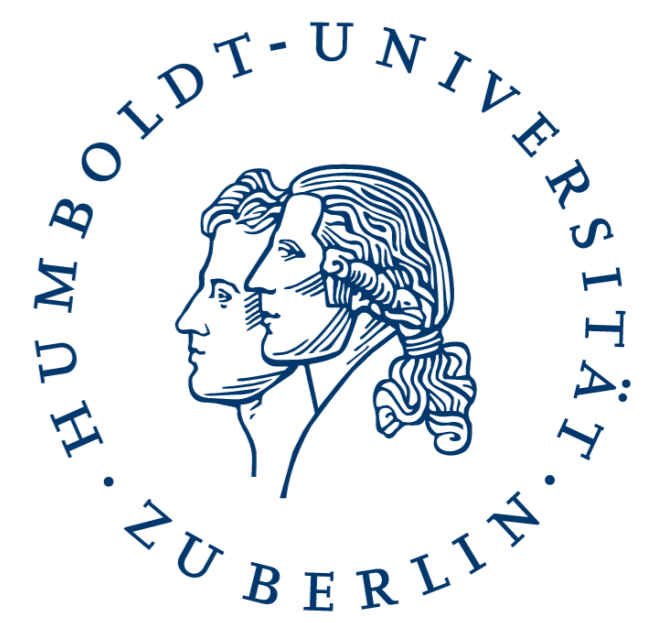


# Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL)

## Skin-lightening brand "Fair & Lovely":

(New) tie-up of Gender, Social Entrepreneurship and Global Marketing in Advertisement



With 250 million consumers, "Fair & Lovely" Hindustan Unilever Limited's largest skincare-brand in skin-lightening products is present in over 30 countries.<sup>1</sup> It is a leading corporation for skin-lightening products with transnational agencies (subsidiaries) for the Asian and African region. Since its launch in 1975, "Fair & Lovely" has supported and emphasized prevailing beauty and gender standards in Indian society especially through campaign ads. Focusing on women as the main consumers in the eighties and nineties, the campaign ads emphasized the importance of the product for good marital prospects and for financial security by forging a femininity that was dependent on male approval. After facing criticism by the All Indian Democratic Women's Association for its sexist and racist "air hostess ad" in 2002, HUL changed its marketing strategy.<sup>2</sup>



Ad on silverscreen.in  
Fair & Lovely Foundation Award celebration 2014

### The Unilever Sustainable Living Plan

In 2003, HUL launched the "Fair & Lovely Foundation" as a part of their corporate social responsibility strategy. The foundation aimed to economically empower young women across India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia through knowledge, skills and career guidance.<sup>3</sup> The foundation works together with national and international institutions, networks and companies like the National Skills Development Corporation, which has a mandate to skill 150 million people by 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Today, HUL focuses its advertising efforts on skin-lightening products by promoting women's economic inclusion as a business priority. There seems to be a thematic shift that follows the global tendency of consumerism, economic and social aspiration as well as upward mobility. According to the HUL Annual Report 2016-17, the "Fair & Lovely Foundation" focuses on higher employability and competitiveness in the education and business market.<sup>5</sup>



Ad on sawdust.co.in  
Fair & Lovely Foundation business partners

### Relevance, Methods & Research Questions

Although the discourses might differ in Asia and Africa, the status of lighter skin color in advertising is fundamentally linked to global consumerism, upward mobility ideals and ideas of (post-)liberalized economic systems. Therefore, the production, marketing and consumption of skin-lightening products must be placed and analyzed in a global socio-economic and political context. My research aims to analyze this issue on a global level but with focus on the Indian discourse. In order to gain insight into HUL "Fair & lovely's" brand policy, I focus on advertisement's circuit and tie-up of Gender, CSR including Corporate Reputation and Global Marketing by analyzing constructs and reconstructs of discourses.

How is "Fair & Lovely" interwoven into the national and global economic system and its circuits of entrepreneurs, brand ambassadors, marketing strategies, products and capital?  
What are the current socio-cultural themes, symbols and messages used to create the desire for a lighter skin that increased the consumption of "Fair & lovely" skin-lightening products?  
How did "Fair & lovely" campaign ads seize on gender representations during the long process of economic liberalization? And how do the campaign ads seize on gender representations in contemporary post-liberalized India?

Bellinda Widmann Kambili, Abschlusscolloquium des Bereichs Gender & Media Studies for the South Asian Region (SoSe 2017), Prof. Dr. Nadja-Christina Schneider

<sup>1</sup> Hindustan Unilever Limited brand "Fair & Lovely". <https://www.hul.co.in/brands/our-brands/fair-and-lovely.html>. (accessed June 20, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> BBC. 2003. India debates "racist" skin cream ads. BBC News World Edition July 24, 2003. [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/3089495.stm](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-3089495) (accessed June 20, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Fair & Lovely Foundation. <https://www.fairandlovely.in/about-fair-and-lovely-foundation>. (accessed June 20, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> fairandlovelyfoundation.in. <https://www.fairandlovelyfoundation.in/partners> (accessed July 07, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> HUL Annual Report 2016-17. [https://www.hul.co.in/Images/annual-report-2016-17\\_tcm1255-507593\\_en.pdf](https://www.hul.co.in/Images/annual-report-2016-17_tcm1255-507593_en.pdf) (accessed June 20, 2017).