



ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА

ИНДИЯ В ГЛОБАЛЬНОЙ МЕДИАСФЕРЕ: КРЕАТИВНЫЙ КАПИТАЛ КАК ДВИЖУЩАЯ СИЛА

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Gandhi as a Brand: How Intermedia Advertisements Subvert His Transversal Values

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Abstract. Examined the process of media reinterpretation of Mahatma Gandhi's legacy in 20th–21st century Indian advertising. Drawing on 37 case studies, it demonstrates how the philosopher's transversal values (ahimsa, swaraj) are supplanted by commercial narratives, reducing his ideas to utilitarian slogans. As a result, Gandhi's iconography in popular culture transforms the philosopher into a brand serving consumer society, while advertising practices dilute his political philosophy, emphasizing superficial symbols (clothing, glasses) within the framework of heteronomous preferences. In the contemporary digital world, Gandhi's transversal values are under threat. This process reflects a global trend of commodifying historical figures, where depth is replaced by questionable utility. The methodological framework combines visual analysis of advertising imagery and discourse analysis of its interplay with Gandhi's original texts, worldview, and his archetype as a moral sage and mentor. The study contributes to the debate on the conflict between cultural memory and the logic of media markets.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, India, iconography, advertising texts, media, media culture, satyagraha

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Ганди как бренд: эволюция разрушения трансверсальных ценностей в медийной рекламе

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Аннотация. Исследуется процесс медийного переосмысления наследия Махатмы Ганди в индийской рекламе XX–XXI вв. На материале 37 кейсов демонстрируется, как трансверсальные ценности философа (ахимса, сварадж) замещаются коммерческими нарративами, что приводит к редукции его идей до утилитарных лозунгов. В итоге иконография Ганди в популярной культуре превращает философа в бренд, обслуживающий интересы потребительского общества, рекламные практики нивелируют его политическую философию, акцентируя поверхностные символы (одежда, очки) в контексте гетерономных предпочтений. В современном цифровом мире трансверсальные ценности Ганди находятся под угрозой. Этот процесс отражает глобальный тренд коммодификации исторических фигур, где глубина подменяется сомнительной полезностью. Методологическая основа включает визуальный анализ рекламных образов и дискурс-анализ их взаимодействия с оригинальными текстами Ганди, его мировоззрением, образом праведника, наставника-мудреца. Исследование вносит вклад в дискуссию о конфликте между культурной памятью и логикой медиарынков.

Ключевые слова: Махатма Ганди, Индия, иконография, рекламные тексты, медиа, медийная культура, сатьяграха

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Introduction

The article examines the nature of Gandhi's representation in mediatised Indian popular culture in intermedia advertisements. In order to do so, first, this paper explores what Gandhi's own transversal values and iconography represent, revealing

two contradictory developments – the dichotomy between the iconography of *res publica* and the popular representation of Gandhi, covering the contents of thirty-seven cases, delving into the essence of representation, including explicit and implicit branding.

Before moving further, it is contingent to underscore the meaning of mediated popular culture. The term ‘mediatization’ refers to the incremental influence of the media as a meta-process (Livingstone, Lunt, 2014) on a range of societal facets, such as politics, religion, culture, and daily life. The term mediatized popular culture refers to how the media shapes popular culture of beliefs and customs of a common community. The larger impact of mediatization on society, behaviour, and people’s perceptions of the world happens through proliferation of media technologies or the growth of media content and is most easily visible in common iconographies of popular culture.

Gandhi’s Transversal Values and Iconography in Mediatized Popular Culture. Gandhi (1869–1948) remains one of the essential referential points in Indian everyday life and popular culture (Rai, 2022). His form of political action, Satyagraha or non-violent resistance against injustice is well documented and debated due to its transformative impact both on the participants in Satyagraha and oppositional forces. It builds on the ideas of commons, inclusivity and anti-passivity (Gandhi, 1910, 1927, 1929, 1968). Other epistemological interventions which are anti-binary and anti-lexical priority and constitute the ‘transversal values’ are rooted in Gandhi’s non-territorialised theorisation, for example, his ‘modern civilisation’ critique rejecting binaries and prioritisation between countries (Rai, 2025). His bodily clothing, walking stick, spectacles, loincloths, spinning wheel, ascetic image, sandals, ashrams, talking while walking, seating images while listening or working, giggling with children, presence of male and female images, visiting colonies of underclasses – all images point out two distinctive transversal values - decentralisation and accessibility (Rai, 2023). Gandhi’s ‘body is/as the message’ which is half-naked, symbolises minimalism and transparency. This chosen asceticism with secular body is a conscious political message against state violence with an intersectional appeal, building his transverse against sectarian nationalism, religious symbolism, masculinity, absolute binary, othering, humiliation, sublime violence, and majoritarianism of popular bodies.

Contradictory Developments. Gandhi’s iconography in mediated popular culture, happens via two contradictory agencies. First is the state-led iconography creating popular sites of Gandhi’s iconography with compromised transversal values. This is a heteronymous state with centralised and societal binaries. This is exhibited in roads, institutions and flagship policies (like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), named after Gandhi, his pictures on currency, his framed photographs in government institutions, using his spectacle for Government’s flagship programme Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission). State intervention has expanded Gandhi’s iconography in far-reaching corners and yet there is the marginalisation of Gandhi’s ‘anti-violent state’ and ‘transverse’ by ‘heteronomy’ and ‘sectarian nationalism’ in this Gandhi of *res publica*.

Second, people's iconography in mediatised popular culture emphasises on Gandhi's message, example, use of 'Gandhi' diary, Gandhi placards in protest movements, cartoons in newspapers and walls, Gandhi as sign of peace, his high-rise sculptures in metropolitan cities, low-rise sculptures in small towns and villages, murals, as a character/image in Indian films, postage stamps and so on. Here, Gandhi's image is democratised in vivid forms (Benjamin, 1969), reinventing Gandhi's transverse via massive production and circulation.

Gandhi and Indian Intermedia Advertisements. Advertisements are an essential part of a mediatised popular culture as these generate discourse around products, creating brands, and impacting customer's behaviour. These are a part of consumer-centric brand normalisation with psychological and emotional techniques to connect with a heterogeneous base of customers. Advertisement works on the 'negative principle, anything which does not bear its seal of approval is economically suspect' (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002). In Indian advertisements, Gandhi as a philosopher (Bilgrami, 2001) gives way to Gandhi as a brand. Gandhi's numerous transversal values as discussed earlier, Satyagraha, participation in Indian Freedom struggle, Swaraj, truth and non-violence – all make him a viable brand, as an appropriate advice. However, Gandhi's expansive transverse philosophy is replaced by narrow utility-centric advertisement/branding.

Brands have appropriated Gandhi through consumption and ownership. For instance, in 1920s there were cigarettes bearing his name, and he himself cautioned people against accepting any advertisement/branding of his name without his signature (Khanduri, 2012; Gonsalves, 2010). After independence, the government of India passed the Emblems and Names (Improper Use) Act of 1950. This law differentiates between public and private benefits, wherein it specifies individuals whose names and likenesses cannot be used for trade or business without government permission. The name M.K. Gandhi appears on the list. Modifications to the 1950 Act in 1982 permitted the authorised use of postal stamps, souvenirs, state-backed institutions, and government-approved circulation for various purposes. Yet, advertisements featuring Gandhi's name and likeness have circulated in India both before and after its enactment (Mazzarella, 2010).

Materials and Methods

The following sections give content analysis of certain 36 advertisements and 17 specific infographics in India retrieved from Adspot (an advertising archive commercial database)¹, which will be discussed thematically. These advertisement and infographics issued since the end of 1940s till 2023.

The selection of these was based on purposive sampling, focusing on materials from 2007 onwards that explicitly or implicitly summoned Gandhi's imagery, values, or symbolism. This period marks a renewed interest in national identity and

¹ See references of the 36 advertisements and 17 specific infographics in India retrieved from Adspot. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-nJ0kdLhyjKYvnUD8DWMKj9NGpAcmS7N/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110601087379243514676&rtpof=true&sd=true>

heritage within Indian advertising, coinciding with the rapid expansion of broadband internet and the growing significance of digital platforms as key sites for advertising. The cases were chosen for their thematic relevance, heterogeneity of sources (government campaigns, FMCGs, financial institutions, etc.), and public visibility, ensuring a representative spread of Gandhian ideals appropriated in commercial and state narratives. Table² explains the representation of Gandhi in Indian intermedia advertisements in terms of distortion of Gandhi's transversal values.

Case 1: Little Gandhi Ad-Lifebuoy. The advertisement portrays a young boy dressed up like Gandhi, wearing spectacles and carrying a broom. The kid starts to clean his locality, and after seeing him, other kids join him. It ends by stating, 'The world can be changed by only those who have no fear!' (Divya, 2007).

Case 2: Gandhiji Ke Teen Bandar-Lifebuoy. It revolves around the theme of Gandhi's three monkeys, narrating the principles of 'hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil' to school children; the last kid (acting as a monkey) is not able to come to stage due to bad health, bringing in the importance of using Lifebuoy soap for health and hygiene (Chrome, 2004).

Case 3: Hutchison Essar. The ad uses old clips of the massive crowd with general public and leaders attending Gandhi's funeral procession, followed by a text, 'In 1942, Winston Churchill called this man a useless, half-naked fakir. Don't jump to conclusions. Open your mind. ESSAR' (David, 2002).

Case 4: The Gandhi Font. It states, 'Gandhi saw things differently... we decided to recreate his vision for the current generation of Indians'. After this, his spectacles are broken and replaced by the image of a new Hindi 'Gandhifont' (गान्धीजीफॉन्ट) 'in the regional Devanagari script, where each letter has trademark Gandhi glasses subtly incorporated' (Burnett, 2012).

Case 5: Maha Cement. It depicts a kid renovating an old statue of Gandhi in bad condition, using Maha Cement, ending with the quote, 'Strong personalities are built strong. Maha Cement number 1 strong cement' (Maha, 2015).

Case 6: Western Union-Franklin/Gandhi. It shows the Western Union demo billboard of Gandhi strategically placed around the outlets that showed many businesses. It says, 'The billboards generated conversation way beyond their locations; the result, 100% of all express transactions in these outlets, were through Western Union' (Erickson, 2012).

Case 7: Killer Jeans. It states, "One man saw what millions could not. 'The Lathi' was a symbol of hatred & fear. One old man's grip changed what millions couldn't, one man could, dare to dream, Killer Jeans". Showing Gandhi's spectacles, lathi, him holding it, breaking off chains (Killer, 2012).

Case 8: Hindustan Times. The advertisement depicts a government office with a long queue. A man with a thuggish appearance breaks the line, submitting his file with bribe of a note with Gandhi's image. A person from the queue intervenes and lightly strikes the officer with a rolled newspaper for taking it. The next day, same

² Representation of Gandhi in Indian Intermedia Advertisements (2007–2023). https://docs.google.com/document/d/10HcNEsVxG-rJgtYGPFDKbEX_SsMirYII/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110601087379243514676&rtfpof=true&sd=true

thuggish man attempted the same tactic. This time, the officer emphasises justice and honesty by hitting the goon with the newspaper with the lines: ‘It is time to follow the real Gandhi’ (Abhijeet4you, 2011).

Case 9: Tata Tea- #JaagoRe. It portrays common scenarios of bribery and says, ‘people tend to ape Gandhi but take money as corruption fed by common people. From today onwards stop feeding and make them drink tea’ (Tata, 2021).

Case 10: Aditya Group-Mahatma Gandhi as Teacher, Mentor, Friend. It begins with a quote with Gandhi’s picture ‘Some will earn more and others less. Normally, people with talents will have more. Such people should be viewed as Trustees-Mohandas Gandhi’. This is followed by images of Aditya Group performing social services (Aditya, 2021).

Case 11: Tatas-Mahatma Gandhi. It provides an audio-video format for Gandhi’s (Tata and I) words related to Jamshed Ji Tata, Ratan Tata, contribution to Satyagraha, use of Taj Mahal Palace Hotel Mumbai, Lady Meher Bai Tata, Tata Steel as a great Indian firm, and their belief in Swaraj (Tata, 2019).

Case 12: Transforming livelihoods (Tata Group). It highlights various agricultural issues and introduces “Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives (cInI)”, a Tata Trusts initiative that helped farmers in Maharashtra diversify and increase their incomes, in Gandhian fashion (Tata, 2016).

Case 13: TATA Salt-Gandhi in Me. It is a cartoon story of a man scanning news of scams, violence, and theft. Still, he states that the country has more good than bad today, urging to show good stories through Facebook (Tata, 2015).

Case 14: TATA Salt-A salt art tribute to the Mahatma. It showcases an artist making art forms related to Gandhi using salt and simultaneously showcasing his various thoughts (Tata, 2018).

Case 15: Raymond Khadi Collection. It promotes Khadi as a symbol of Indian cultural pride and adapting to fashion. It shows models wearing a modern form of Khadi in a salt desert with a voiceover associating Khadi, Gandhi, and fashion (Raymond, 2018).

Case 16: Raymond Khadi-The Story Re-spun. The models walking on white salt deserts. The voiceover depicts the process of making Khadi: ‘You don’t just wear Khadi; you re-affirm your independence of thought and action’ (Raymond, 2020).

Case 17: Gandhi Optics Sunglasses. Promoting sunglasses for the summer look, it shows Gandhi-fashioned sunglasses as the new cool look (Creative, 2019).

Case 18: Hindustan Unilever-Swachh Aadat, Swachh Bharat. It states, ‘In the week leading to Gandhi Jayanti, actors dressed as Mahatma Gandhi walked the streets of Mumbai’. It shows one dressed as Gandhi cleaning the street. It concludes by quoting, ‘Don’t just remember Mahatma Gandhi; remember his values too’ (Hindustan, 2018).

Case 19: Cute little boy imitates Gandhi – Manyavar. A day before Republic Day, a kid imitates Gandhi with a dhoti, stick, and specs, excited to wear traditional dress the next day. As his father seems busy, he practices self-reliance, picking the dress for himself and his father designed by Manyavar (Manyavar, 2015).

Case 20: Babu Ki Aawaz – Byjus depicts Gandhi as a beloved hero among children who inquire about him from their grandfather. Ad showcases individuals who follow Gandhi's principles in current times – Jamuna Tudu (Environment), Sapan Patralekh (Education), Ganesh Rakh (Health) and Kameshwar Waghmare (fitness) stating that an honest heart keeps the spirit of Gandhi alive (Byju's, 2021).

Case 21: Gandhi Jayanti 2020 Indian Oil Corporation Limited. Image of Gandhi and background score states 'Mahatma Gandhi's thinking of Swadeshi led our country to the path of independence. Let this Gandhi Jayanti make Swadeshi power our nation's power.' The graphic image in the video shows Gandhi with charkha, in salt march, and with a kid (Indian, 2020).

Case 22: Gandhi Lives On-Gandhi Jayanti – Eros Now Musics. This advertisement celebrates Gandhi's enduring legacy using the song *Paintra*. The video juxtaposes Gandhi's philosophies with contemporary violence, littering, bribery, and harassment in front of Gandhi's symbols. The advertisement ends with the quote: 'Gandhi lives on; let's make him more than a symbol' (Eros, 2018).

Case 23: Exclusive Gandhi Jayanti Special Song – T Series. It uses the song *Bande Mein Tha Dum* with a graphic image of Gandhi and his quotes, 'An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind; God has no religion; There is more to life than simply increasing its speed' (T-Series, 2014).

Case 24: You walk on M.G. Road – Tata Salt. It shows an audio-visual advertisement board situated on Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai. Gandhi's voice nudges people and asks them to pledge to keep the city clean by showing visuals of Gandhi and the dirty city. The voiceover highlights the impact of following Gandhi's path. Interviews with people express appreciation for Tata Salt's initiative to place the audio-visual board (Tata, 2019).

Case 25: Cipla Health Gandhi Jayanti Campaign. It uses Naselin Nasal Spray to create the charkha spinning wheel. With the caption, 'He fought against injustice so that the entire nation could have a Shubhratri' (Anuburn, n.d.).

Case 26: Minister White Tribute to Gandhi – Tamil. It features a group of musicians dressed in white playing various instruments in diverse geographic locations, with large poster of Gandhi, depicting Gandhi and his followers dressed in white in front of the Red Fort, where he is seen spinning white thread (Minister, 2020).

Case 27. Union Bank. It shows the bank's history, as its head office in Mumbai was inaugurated by Gandhi in 1921. In his address, Gandhi emphasised the ability of the bank to manage large amounts of money efficiently for national activities espousing values such as peace, cleanliness, and honesty, honouring Gandhian foundation of a self-reliant India. The ad promotes the government initiative of designating an hour on October 1 for cleanliness. Another highlights the bank's CSR initiatives, which include building toilets and providing basic needs to orphanages and nursing homes (Union, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Case 28: Gandhi Jayanti-Celebrating the Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi PNB HFL. This showcases old visuals of Gandhi walking with the masses. It also quotes, 'Inspired by India's freedom struggle, we dedicate ourselves to freedom from

struggle, freedom from waiting – home loans; freedom from uncertainty – loan against property; freedom from anxiety – fixed deposits’ (PNB, 2020).

Case 29: Gandhi Jayanti special- Radio City India. It depicts Gandhi not just as a name but as an ideal. A child dressed as Gandhi corrects a woman for littering, prompting her to apologise and pledge cleanliness. It ends with the statement that Gandhi’s imprint should not be restricted to money notes but to thought processes (Radio, 2018).

Case 30: Happy Gandhi Jayanthi- MadAds. It features a montage of historical photos of Gandhi set and culminates in a graphic image created from Gandhi’s original photos, accompanied by the quote, ‘Happy Gandhi Jayanti’ (Mad, 2017).

Case 31: Wipro Consumer Care and Lightings. It features a graphic image of Gandhi focusing on his spectacles. The lenses are brightened to showcase a bright light, symbolising the brand’s light (Experience commerce, 2022).

Case 32: Reliance Digital. The video shows a graphic of Gandhi in a boat, featuring Reliance Digital and Reliance Jio logos. His spectacles emerge, one lens showing quotes of Gandhi and in other the work done by brand (Reliance, 2023).

Case 33: GOQii. It comes with the quote, ‘He walked 386 km; we can walk an hour daily. He offered peace; we can meditate. He fasted; we can detox. He stood firm for his beliefs; we can make a difference for ourselves’ #BETHEFORCE (GOQii, 2022).

Case 34: Axis Bank. It uses Gandhi’s spectacles to denote the idea of peace (Axis, 2023).

Case 35: ICICI Bank. It shows that the bank offers financial wisdom inspired by Mahatma Gandhi: ‘Prioritise needs over wants for financial stability’ (ICICI, 2023).

Case 36: Union Bank: It highlights the location of Gandhi’s first Satyagraha (Union, 2023).

Case 37: 17 specific infographics in India retrieved from ads spot (an advertising archive commercial database) are as follows: Coco’s Café (showing Gandhi’s conversation at Birla House, Delhi on January 30, 1948); Whitex Correction Pens by Soni Officemate (A letter where the Viceroy of India states Gandhi as harmless); Denodia photo lib (image of Gandhi on a book); The readers book shop (A world map using red to highlight where Gandhi stayed, specifically India and Africa; representing ‘My Experiments with Truth’); Dhara Veg Oil (Image of Gandhi with caption – ‘My Daddy Strongest’); Kurl On (Gandhi’s journey – falling from train on Kurl On bed mattress and bouncing back as Mahatma with charkha); Story Bookshop (Gandhi’s image with highlighting spectacles and using lens as O to write BOOK); Xerox (Printing of picture of Gandhi from printer); Western Union (Image of Gandhi on the American note); Tide (A graphic image of Gandhi with a lathi and a white dhoti so clean it blends into the white background); Winco ship matches (image of Gandhi as flames); Happydent (image of Gandhi made by happydent and caption – giving millions a reason to smile); Turtle (image of Gandhi and others with charkha with quote Fabric of Freedom); Rotomac (graphic image of Gandhi made by pen); In Gandhi’s shoes (news story titled: Stepping into Gandhi’s

shoes); Fingerprint Audio Books (image of Gandhi and adjacent to it is headphone and caption-listen to the leaders) (Adsspot, n.d.).

Results and Discussion

These advertisements while ritually honouring Gandhi, alter his transversal values replacing it with product's concept and its branding, either explicitly or implicitly.

Explicit Branding: CSR, Trusteeship, and Explicit Brand Endorsement. Case 10 illustrates the brand's CSR initiatives and asserts that Gandhi's concept of trusteeship served as inspiration for their beliefs. Case 11 leverages the brand Gandhi and his words to enhance brand promotion. Case 12 illustrates how a corporate group draws inspiration from Gandhi to engage in corporate social responsibility. Case 14 leverages the relationship between salt and Gandhi for promotional purposes. Case 15 uses Gandhi and Khadi to promote the brand. Case 16 uses Gandhi's Khadi to highlight the company's Khadi production.

Case 17 uses the name of Gandhi to encourage and make a brand. Case 24 uses multiple levels of advertisement tools to endorse the brand. Case 25 uniquely uses charkha for promotion. Case 26 uses colour in sync with the brand. Case 27 incorporates Gandhi into multiple advertisements, endorsing his brand and his words for the bank and drawing inspiration from Gandhi's principles of cleanliness and trusteeship. Case 28 draws a parallel between Gandhi's ideas and the bank's approach to problem-solving. This visual tribute promotes market development in Case 30. Gandhi opposed using advertisements, yet this advertising company profited from selling Gandhi's products. Case 31 represents the brand's product, the light. Case 32 prominently displays the product logo as a symbol of change. Case 33 emphasis is consistent with the brand. Case 35 highlights the significance of the financial plan. Cases 37 (infographic advertisements) superimpose brands over Gandhi's image in unsubtle ways.

Implicit Branding: Cleanliness and Health Hygiene. Case 1 and 2 highlights Gandhi's idea of cleanliness and how an individual with conviction can change the course of action in the world. The narrative aims to demonstrate that these are not just products but also a catalyst for positive changes in public health. Case 18 promotes cleanliness as part of the Swachh Bharat. Case 29 emphasises cleanliness, and people's outlook of him is limited to image on the money notes.

Communication. Case 3 illustrates Gandhi's value and how he connected with the larger masses, demonstrating effective communication. Case 13 highlights how another social platform embraces and shares the positive aspects of society. Case 22 uses music as a medium to create public discourse.

Symbolism. Case 4 shows a unique way of using Gandhi's spectacles. Case 7 uses Gandhi's concept of Khadi – that an individual can effect change. Case 34 uses spectacle to convey the idea of peace.

A Strong Personality. Case 5 portrays Gandhi as having a strong personality who believed in a change in personality over time. Case 20 underscores Gandhi remains a hero figure.

Speed and Transformation. Case 6 uses Gandhi on billboards to attract people to the brand, even though ironically, the billboards celebrate the concept of speed, something that Gandhi opposed. Infact, case 23 uses Gandhi's idea of change to celebrate speed.

Corruption. Case 8 presents Gandhi's idea of fighting corruption, albeit with violence, (corrupt person being hit on the head with newspaper). Case 9 exemplifies Gandhi's philosophy against corruption.

Self-reliance, Swadeshi, and Satyagraha. Case 20 highlights Gandhi's idea of self-reliance. Case 21 promotes Indian goods a la *Swadeshi*. Case 36 uses the location of Gandhi's first Satyagraha.

Conclusion

Gandhi is essential because of his transversal values. Popular culture serves as a crucial platform for the dissemination of Gandhi's philosophy. Advertisements are a necessary component of popular culture, and they are critical due to their maximum capacity for dissemination and infinite digital consumption. Advertisements use Gandhi as a brand circumventing his role as a philosopher or transformer. Gandhi is resurrected to conform to heteronomous norms, becoming a site of consumption instead of a transformational space.

Gandhi's unrestrained expression as a philosopher comes to an end without a comprehensive representation, diminishing his image, reducing it to a mere add-on movement for advertising rather than disrupting the monopoly of uncritical consensus about every product. In intermedia advertisements, Gandhi's images replace Gandhi's Belief.

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