

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

"Once Zara comes in and changes their shop windows five times a month, and Louis Vuitton buys out Indian designers who don't know what their business is worth, most designers will lose any edge they have in the market!"

*Fashion journalist **Hindol** Sengupta comes with a warning from the Indian fashion experience*

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While India marked its Independence Day on August 15, a smattering of Karachi's journalists and fashionistas headed to The Second Floor (**T2F**) to hear Indian journalist **Hindol** Sengupta speak about the oft talked about but little acted upon concepts of building brands in fashion. The event was put together by the editor of Xpoze magazine Andleeb Rana to have people from the fashion industry listen to her friend **Hindol** who she cites as having learnt a good deal from during her years working in the industry. **T2F** has become a crossroad for art, culture and music to meet - given how large scale events are being canceled, the more cozy, intimate events at **T2F** are incredibly enjoyable and bring together an exciting mix of people! Hindol's talk was no exception - in audience were Faiza Samee, Sonya Battla, Sadaf Malaterre, Amin Gulgee, Ammar Zaidi (of Daku fame) and the three big fashion retailers were well represented. Zahir Rahimtoola of Labels, Asad Tareen of The Designers and Shehrnaz Hussain of Ensemble were all there.

While the audience sipped their cold coffees and caught up on news from the world of Pakistani fashion, the mood was definitely set for an interesting evening. The buzz in the air was about Karachi Fashion Week (KFW), taking place a day after Hindol's talk, and Andleeb's laughing disclaimer '**Hindol** is not here to cover Karachi



Fashion Week!' was part of her introduction for her guest. While **Hindol** seemed enthused to be in Pakistan and looked every bit the desi in his kurta pajama and waistcoat, his audience was quite attentive too!

He may not have been here to cover KFW, but his talk was a perfect prelude to the event. During his talk, **Hindol** Sengupta spoke about principles that will guide the world of fashion to a more competitive era, that may be textbook to any one who's studied entrepreneurship or marketing, but sadly is still unknown to the vast chunk of our designers!

Hindol wavered between concepts of retailing and brand building, peppered with hilarious anecdotes and unique examples from India. His key themes focused on designers moving to prêt wear lines and creating more affordable lines to hook new consumers on with, building a brand beyond a designer's name and personality, and effective marketing.



While he says this is still something Indian designers need to adopt, (and Pakistani, may we add!) Hindol's been doing research for his new book and has the facts to back his theories up! For example, Indians in rural areas recognize the Manish Malhotra brand - only because he is 'the' designer to Bollywood and that's how they have been exposed to Manish's clothes. That's effective marketing for Manish, and once this market segment moves up and wants to spend cash - Manish Malhotra will be the designer they go to. **Hindol** also talked about how designers are not looking into creating any products for such newly rich potential consumers to mark their first brand-name purchases. The same thing is so true for Pakistan - where in the past few years people have gotten rich overnight (thank you, Karachi Stock Exchange) and would like to spend money on brand names but don't know where to start with. While we do have examples of Amir Adnan and Ammar Belal who are actually creating brands and moving beyond bridal wear such as Adnan's FnkAsia that caters to a younger market, the rest of the lot are still selling on the basis of their name.



And this is what **Hindol** highlighted as well. The question 'can your brand outlive your name?' is very pertinent in the region, where designers are selling on the basis of their fame. **Hindol** pointed out that with global brands already coming into India, with an onset in Pakistan sooner than later, designers have to start looking at their operations in a more business oriented way - have a brand name and philosophy, that people can associate with as opposed to a person's name that could die the day the business wraps up. For this, **Hindol** says, designers have to capitalize on the strengths that are available to us in the subcontinent: the superior textiles, skill sets, tailoring, labor etc. After all, as **Hindol** rightly pointed out, if foreign brands such as Roberto Cavalli can outsource and have their clothes manufactured in India using Indian skill sets, why can an Indian designer not get the same out of their labor? Moreover, the business sense for running a retail operation effectively needs to happen, and fast - before global brands hit the Indian Ocean and blow local designers away by their relative affordability, superior quality, and business sense. As **Hindol** said, once Zara comes in and changes their shop windows five times in a month, and Louis Vuitton buys out Indian designers who don't know what their business is, most designers will lose any edge they have in the market! With this interesting combination of business and fashion, **Hindol** Sengupta was a treat to listen to - having written about both

industries in India for years, he has a great understanding of where fashion needs to head to.

In terms of business acumen, **Hindol** laughingly pointed out that we have the most to gain from the example of Hashmi Kajal being wildly popular in Mumbai simply through word-of-mouth! With gossip being the favorite pastime of all and sundry in the subcontinent, word of mouth marketing, using innovative icons, names and mediums will be how brands get introduced to new consumers! The highlight of the talk was his example of Sula Wines - an Indian wine brand that has the sun god as its logo and is merely capitalizing on the fact that its wine from India - which people will recognize because of that iconic logo (**Hindol**: "Even if you show a blind man that sun logo he'll think India!"). Most of the audience was rather shocked that there was even a wine industry in India - but there you have it - its unique, new, and capitalizes on its strength: where it comes from. Hindol's point is this is what Pakistan and India need to do as well - capitalize on our skill sets and quality. Answering a question from Amin Gulgee as to why should designers stop doing bridals, **Hindol** said that he agreed that they shouldn't, but designers need to use their ability at making great bridal couture into making great prêt wear as well.



The talk was quite interesting since it was the held the evening before KFW kicked off in the city, which on Day One focused heavily on bridal wear and resembled a fashion extravaganza as opposed to a show catering towards attracting buyers and moving to retailing. Designer Bibi Russell echoed Hindol's thoughts when she said after the show "There were some good things, but I wish it had been more unique, more prêt.." It remains to be seen whether Pakistani designers will heed to the buzz in the air, but here's hoping for great things to kick off from small beginnings like these!