“Hey baby, I Have a Start-up!”

An ethnographic account of media start-ups in Delhi, India, their fight for societal change and the start-up network they are a part of

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“Everything in Delhi is a start-up”
Hey baby, I Have a Start-up!: An ethnographic account of media start-ups in Delhi, India, their fight for societal change and the start-up network they are a part of
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Abstract

Start-up networks are flourishing around the world, and today the third largest amounts of start-ups are based in India. During my fieldwork in Delhi, I looked further into the start-up network and found a lot of start-ups within the media industry. These are started by young media entrepreneurs who publish stories about issues, I was told, that were tabooed in society, such as female sexuality, caste discrimination and religious divide. This thesis gives an ethnographic account of media start-ups, how they want change in the society and the start-up network they are a part of. My aim is to investigate how these media start-ups and the start-up network reflect a larger youth rebellion in Indian society, a rebellion where young urban middle class Indians challenge established hierarchies, taboos and stereotypes.

During my fieldwork, I focused on one of these taboos: the taboo surrounding female sexuality and patriarchal gender roles. My female informants were all challenging expectations from their parents and society who wanted them to act as good girls, a term used to describe a woman who succumbs to these expectations, such as one who does not drink alcohol, smoke, date or stay out late. My informants, on the other hand, were bad girls, a label usually given to women who act improperly, meaning that they opposed the good girl stereotype with their behaviour. I will also investigate how this and other issues expressed as taboos, are handled by the media entrepreneurs who want to use their digital platforms to make a change in India. Another important topic for investigation will be the start-up network that these media entrepreneurs are part of and what it means to become an entrepreneur in an Indian context.
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Prologue .................................................................................................................................................. 12

Introduction........................................................................................................................................... 13
Aim of Thesis .......................................................................................................................................... 14
Background ........................................................................................................................................... 14
  Independence, Partition and Hindu Nationalism ............................................................................... 14
  Neoliberal India, a Growing Middle Class and the Enterprise Culture ........................................... 15
  A changing mediascape ..................................................................................................................... 17
  Hierarchies: Caste and marriage ....................................................................................................... 17
Theoretical outline .................................................................................................................................. 19
  Entrepreneurship ............................................................................................................................... 20
  Becoming ........................................................................................................................................... 20
  Different forms of capital ................................................................................................................... 21
  Key Symbols ...................................................................................................................................... 22
Methodology ........................................................................................................................................... 23
  Entering the Field ............................................................................................................................... 23
  Access to the Start-up Network .......................................................................................................... 24
  Language ........................................................................................................................................... 25
  Netnography and Bollywood ........................................................................................................... 25
  Interviews .......................................................................................................................................... 26
  Participant observation ...................................................................................................................... 27
  Conversations .................................................................................................................................... 27
  Positioning .......................................................................................................................................... 27
  Ethical reflections ............................................................................................................................. 28
Overview of chapter ................................................................................................................................ 28

Chapter 1: Becoming an Entrepreneur ................................................................................................. 31
Money, glamour and coolness .............................................................................................................. 31
  Getting success ................................................................................................................................. 33
Venture Capitalists, Angels and Unicorns ............................................................................................ 34
The pitching performance .................................................................................................................... 35
  The pitching session .......................................................................................................................... 36
  Takes every chance to pitch .............................................................................................................. 38
  The importance of technology .......................................................................................................... 39
  Power within the ecosystem .............................................................................................................. 40
Access to entrepreneurial Gurus ......................................................................................................... 40
Start-up India ......................................................................................................................................... 42
The hubs ................................................................................................................................................. 43
Social risk and parents’ key scenario .................................................................................................... 45
The struggling entrepreneur, a changing narrative? .......................................................................... 47
Summary ................................................................................................................................................. 48

Chapter 2: The Bad Girl ....................................................................................................................... 49
Gender aspect of the ecosystem .......................................................................................................... 49
Good girl vs bad girl ............................................................................................................................ 50
Negotiating freedom ............................................................................................................................ 52
  Family as a root metaphor and parents symbolic power ................................................................. 53
  Freedom and restrictions .................................................................................................................. 54
Prologue

“The start-up bubble has broken” I overheard someone say at a Delhi house party. His name was Ishan and he’s one of many young entrepreneurs trying to build a successful company in India. It was mid-March and I had been in Delhi for two months, still struggling to get access and even finding the bloggers I initially was going to write about. I had heard a lot of people talk about start-ups earlier on, though never payed that much attention to it. This time it was different. Everyone in the room was involved in the conversation and the way they talked about it made it sound like a phenomenon. A week later Ishan invited me to come to his office. He was working with his team at one of the many start-up hubs in Delhi, a co-working space where a lot of young people start their journey of becoming entrepreneurs. This hub was located in South Delhi, a 15-minute drive from where I lived. It was a bit closed off, so the driver had a difficult time finding the place. We drove into an area where the streets became increasingly smaller and bumpier. The building was white and relatively new compared to the other buildings on the street. On the other side of the street there were chai wallahs (tea stands) and small kiosks where they sold street food, candy and sodas. Ishan came out of the four-story building to meet me and he had brought his co-worker Arun to show me around. The first three floors are open office spaces where start-ups can work. The hub also has its own team who sit on the fourth floor. In the basement there is a large cafeteria which is also used to host different kinds of events where the entrepreneurs can meet investors and mentors. While showing me around, Ishan and Arun talked proudly about the start-up ecosystem in India that they both were a part of. They talked about all their hard work, all the events they attend, their aspirations and their sacrifices. Before I left, Arun turned to me with a huge smile on his face and said “you know, if you just open your eyes and look around, you will see that everything in Delhi is a start-up”. When I came home the same day, one of my flatmates came home from a job-interview. I asked her what kind of job it was, and she said, “it’s just a start-up thing”. Looking back, I realised that all the people I had met so far were in fact part of this start-up network in some way or other.
Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic account of media start-ups in Delhi, how they want change in the society and the start-up network they are a part of. In the prologue I have described my first meeting with the start-up network in Delhi. After my visit to the start-up hub, I understood that this phenomenon was important in my informant’s lives, and the focus in this thesis came about by following the start-up network and my informants. Start-up is a global phenomenon, which started in Silicon Valley and has spread to cities around the world (Coomber 2014:42). Today, India is the country with the third largest number of start-ups (Ayyar 2016). It was my interest in India and digital anthropology that made me go to Delhi for my fieldwork, where my initial plan was to study digital blogging. However, after arriving in the field and starting to meet people, I realised that the blogs I was interested in, were not important in their lives. The people I met were mostly women, and some men in their twenties, who all identified with being part of India’s middle class. Most of them had moved to Delhi from other places in India, to either study or work. While I was still searching for the bloggers, I spent most of my time with these people, and became very interested in how they lived their lives. An important topic in our conversations was the expectations society and their parents had to them. These expectations were about how they should behave, what career they should pursue, when they should get married and who they should get married to. As I got to know them better, I saw how they were constantly juggling between these expectations and the life they wanted to live in the metropolitan city.

The party, described in the prologue, where I met Ishan for the first time was a turning point in my fieldwork. In addition to meeting Ishan, I also met Dhruv, a journalist working for an Indian newspaper who wanted to start his own media start-up. When I met Dhruv a few days later over a coffee, he told me about other start-ups within the media industry. One of these was SpeakUp, a content platform where young people in India send in their stories. When visiting its website, I saw that most of the stories they publish were about the same expectations and issues my other informants had told me.

1 All start-ups and informants have been anonymised.
about. It then became my mission to meet the entrepreneur behind it, Tarun. On this journey, I met other young media entrepreneurs, people who worked in start-ups and others who had written on the SpeakUp platform. When I finally met Tarun, he told me that his mission with his platform was to break down taboos in society. Taboos surrounding sex and sexuality, patriarchal gender roles, the caste hierarchy and the religious divide. He explained that he wanted to make a change in India by giving young Indians a platform where they could publish stories about these taboos. After meeting other media entrepreneurs and following their platforms I noticed that they also published similar stories. Because of the media start-ups and the start-up network importance in my informants’ lives, I changed my field to follow them instead of the bloggers.

**Aim of Thesis**

In this thesis I aim to investigate how media start-ups and the start-up network in India reflect a larger youth rebellion in Indian society. A rebellion where young urban middle class Indians challenge established hierarchies, taboos and stereotypes. During my fieldwork, I had a focus on one of these taboos. The taboo surrounding female sexuality and patriarchal gender roles. My female informants, were all challenging expectations from their parents and society who wanted them to act as *good girls*, a term used to describe a woman who succumbs to these expectations. She should not drink alcohol, smoke, date or stay out late. My informants, on the other hand, were *bad girls*, a label usually given to women who act improperly. Something I will go further into in this thesis. I will also investigate how this and other issues expressed as taboos, are handled by the media entrepreneurs who want to use their digital platforms to make a change in India. Another important topic for investigation will be the start-up network that these media entrepreneurs are part of and what it means to become an entrepreneur in an Indian context.

**Background**

*Independence, Partition and Hindu Nationalism*
An important context in my empirical data is India’s history of colonial rule and the rise of political Hindu nationalism, often referred to as Hindutva. India gained its independence from British colonial rule in 1947, and the country was divided into India and Pakistan. The backdrop for this partition was the All-India Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s wish for a separate country for Indian Muslims. The partition of the country led to violent riots, and it has been estimated that hundreds of thousands people lost their lives (Ruud 2011:303-309). The partition has later been used in the politics of the Hindu nationalist movement, often referred to as Hindutva, to promote a religious divide between Hindus and Muslims. The idea of Hindutva was formulated in the book with the same name published in 1923. It was written by politician V.D Savarkar, who was in jail for subversion of the British colonial power (Corbridge, Harris & Jeffrey 2013:179, Eriksen 1999:55). In his book Savarkar argues that India should be a Hindu nation and that all Indians should recognise their Hindu identity (Eriksen 1999:55-56). While the Hindu nationalist movement has been in India since before independence, they had their political rise during the 90s (Eriksen 1999, Jaffrelot 2007). Today, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is associated with the Hindutva movement, is the ruling government party. Additionally, Banjeree (2005) argues that the Hindu nationalist movement was built on the importance of the Hindu family. For them, a woman who does not fulfil her cultural duty of being a modest wife and mother will hurt the family and by extension the nation (Banjeree 2005:131).

My informants viewed this movement and its outreach as something scary. They would tell me that the values the Hindu nationalists stand for, are what they wanted to change in India. During my fieldwork this was something that always lurked in the background, and therefore it is important context in my analysis.

**Neoliberal India, a Growing Middle Class and the Enterprise Culture**

An important backdrop for understanding the start-up phenomenon in Delhi is the liberalisation of the economy and the neoliberal reforms imposed by the Indian government in the 1990s. In line with David Harvey’s definition, neoliberalism is:

“A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial
Neoliberal policies have, according to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, been pursued by governments around the world since the 1980s (2015:6). In India these reforms have brought enormous economic growth, with a GDP growth rate of 6-8 percent each year. Before the liberalisation of the economy, India’s GDP had a growth rate of 3-4 percent, and India was far behind other countries in the region economically (Ruud, Heierstad & Flåten 2014:136-140). Also, the IT-sector, which is where most start-ups operate, grew with fifty percent per year from 1992-3 to 2000-1 (Thomas 2010:75). The people who have benefitted the most from the economic changes in India over the past couple of decades are the rising ‘modern’ middle class, often characterised by aspiration and visible consumption (McGuire 2011, Brosius 2010, Ganguly-Scarse & Scarse 2008). Furthermore, the economic changes and the possibilities that came with the growth, have given rise to what Gooptu (2013) refers to as an Indian enterprise culture. Drawing on narratives from the Indian film industry, Bollywood, and the public discourse in India, she shows how a new India is portrayed, where “new Indians, whose dreams, passions, and desires fuel and propel all else, and whose powerful, newly liberated, capacity to aspire is in itself an asset” (2013:3). When describing the Indian enterprise culture, Gooptu (2013) clarifies that it is not about entrepreneurship and business per se. Rather it is about a state of mind “in which individuals are optimistic and passionate do-ers in all fields of life” (Gooptu 2013:4). In her book *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India*, she and other contributors “seek to understand the underlying mindset and attitudes that are implicated in India’s current neoliberalizing transition” (Gooptu 2013:s). While Gooptu (2013) has a focus on neoliberalism and enterprise culture as an analytical tool, I have chosen to use other theories to analyse my empirical data. However, the neoliberal changes and the new India, where aspirations are bigger, are important for understanding the friction between my informants and their parents’ generation.

While it would have been interesting to look at start-up and entrepreneurship with modernity as an analytical tool, I have chosen to restrain from using the term. When
talking to my informants they used the term *progressive* rather than modern, to describe themselves and how they wanted India to be. They used the term *regressive* when describing what they wanted change from. I will explain further what they meant with these terms below.

**A changing mediascape**

Since my main focus is on entrepreneurs within the media industry, an important context is the ever-changing *mediascape* they are part of. Appadurai (1990) developed the term mediascape in his theory about globalisation, referring to how the media is affected by global flows. I have used it here to emphasise the changing environment of the media and news consumption in a globalised world (Appadurai 1990, Rao & Johal 2006). While print media is struggling to keep up with digital media in the global mediascape, newspapers in India are still selling, they are in fact increasing their circulation (Rodrigues 2010). However, since the liberalisation of the economy in 1991, Indian media organisations have had to compete in a global market and have become more market-driven because of privatisation and deregulation. This has, according to Rao and Johal (2006), led to blurred lines between news and entertainment, where what has been called infotainment (Thussu 2007) is being prioritised “over more hard-news stories” (Rao & Johal 2006:292). Ranganathan argues that digital phenomena such as blogging have risen in situations where the media has not been able to fulfil their role as reporters, for example during natural disasters and terror attacks (2010:229-246). Even though the start-ups are not personal blogs, they are alternative voices in the digital media landscape, and as such have a resemblance to digital blogging. Also, some of the media entrepreneurs started as blogs, where their motivations were to write about issues the traditional media was not writing about. In the rest of the thesis I will use the term *traditional* or *legacy media* when referring to the media organisations that were present before the digital revolution, as were the terms used by my informants.

**Hierarchies: Caste and marriage**

Important to my informants were the expectations of parents and society. As such it became important during my fieldwork, and in this thesis. These expectations are rooted in the different hierarchies that shape everyday life in India, based on caste, gender and age. The caste hierarchy has received much attention in the scholarly
literature, where one of the most famous writings within anthropology is Louis Dumont (1970). In his book, *Homo hierarchicus: the caste system and its implications*, Dumont (1970) describes the caste system as a ritual hierarchy based on purity and pollution, which, he argues, permeates Indian society. He describes the caste system based on ancient Hindu writings and fieldwork as consisting of four *varnas*. On top of the hierarchy are the *Brahmins* (priests), then *Kshatriyas* (warriors), followed by *Vaishyas* (Merchants) and on the bottom are the *Sudras* (who perform other tasks). Then there are *Dalits* (who have been referred to as untouchables), who are outside the Varna system (Dumont 1970). However, his description has received critique for being too structuralist and based on an upper-caste view of the system (Appadurai 1988, Corbridge, Harris & Jeffrey 2013, Ruud, Heierstad & Flåten 2014). In more recent anthropological writings, caste has been described in line with a system of labour and interaction, where there are multiple different *Jatis* associated with different professions (Mines 2009).

Among my informants, caste was talked about as a regressive system, which marginalised a section of the society. All my informants described themselves as either upper or general caste, and its importance in their lives would vary from whether they were expected to enter into an arranged marriage or not. In India, marriages have traditionally been arranged between people from the same caste (Jacobson 1977, Dickey 2010 [2002]). My informants who were expected to enter into arranged marriages, stressed that the person they were going to marry would preferably be from the same cast. However, it is important to note that this was the case of relatively few of my informants, and I will go further into how they challenged these expectations in my analysis. Also important to note is that the media start-ups I encountered, wanted to break this hierarchy by writing about it.

A hierarchy that seemed to me to be more present in my informants’ lives, was the patriarchy. The patriarchal hierarchy in India assigns different social roles to men and women. Whilst men are seen as the heads of the family, the decision makers and breadwinners, women are responsible for the domestic domain and reproductive tasks (Nielsen & Waldrop 2014:2). My informants claimed that this hierarchy gives certain expectations for men when it comes to their career. Since they are supposed to be the
breadwinners of the family, they are expected to choose a safe career with a stable income. In the following I will go further into how these expectations affected the entrepreneurs within the start-up network.

Women on the other hand, meet different expectations. Traditionally, women were married at a young age (Jacobson 1977 sjekk) and as such, a woman went from being a child to a wife, without a post-pubertal period as un-married in-between. However, as observed by Uberoi (2006) and Brosius (2010), now that the legal age of marriage is eighteen, most women will marry after finishing college, especially in urban areas. In the period between puberty and marriage, as Uberoi points out, a woman must “be very carefully monitored, since any indiscretion on her part would seriously compromise her family’s honour and impair her chances of an advantageous alliance” (2006:25-26). While a women’s behaviour in public can affect her reputation, India has also been referred to as a dangerous country for women. In the aftermath of the brutal gang rape of Joyti Singh in 2012, sexual violence against women has been widely debated and protested against (Nielsen & Waldrop 2014). This is an important context in my analysis, where I will discuss how my informants were expected to be good girls. A good girl was described to me as a young woman who succumbs to her parents and society’s expectations of how she should behave. She should not drink alcohol, smoke, stay out late and she should behave chastely. My informants challenged this stereotype by being bad girls, a label usually given to women who act improperly. It is also important with regard to the media start-ups, who wanted to make a change for women by posting stories about women’s sexuality. On their platforms, violence against women was also objected to. Furthermore, upholding the good girl stereotype and labelling women as bad girls was described as regressive by my informants.

**Theoretical outline**

When writing this thesis, I tried my best to let my empirical data guide me towards my analysis, and not depend on one singular theoretical framework. In what follows I will describe the four different theoretical frameworks that became most important to my writing.
Entrepreneurship

One of the most influential pieces of writings on entrepreneurship within the field of anthropology is Fredrik Barth’s (1967) description of economic spheres in Darfur. In his article, Barth (1967) describes a society consisting of two separate and distant spheres of exchange. One sphere for exchanging certain goods for cash, and another for exchanging millet, beer and labour. The entrepreneur sees an opportunity for combining these spheres of exchange, and create an enterprise selling tomatoes. Prior to this, however, Barth (1963) made an attempt to create an anthropological theory on the topic in his book *The Role of the Entrepreneur in Social Change in Northern Norway*. Here, he defines entrepreneurship as an aspect of a role, in the sense that, as he writes, “it relates to action and activities, and not rights and duties” (Barth 1963:6). My understanding of his definition is that entrepreneurship is something you do, and you become an entrepreneur by engaging in entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, Barth (1963) describes the importance of an entrepreneur’s niche, which is where he/she seeks to exploit the market. He also discusses the meaning of profit and social cost, where he argues that profit is not purely monetary. Profit, according to Barth, may also “take the form of power, rank, or experience and skills” (1963:8). Both his contributions have become an important theoretical framework in my analysis.

Becoming

The entrepreneurs in my study are part of a larger start-up network, which my informants would refer to as an *ecosystem*. This ecosystem, as described by my informants, consists of investors, entrepreneurs, mentors, universities, technologies, start-up hubs and other actors working together as a system to create new start-ups. I have used the term *becoming* (Ingold 2010) to explore how the entrepreneurs and their start-ups are shaped and influenced by their encounters within this ecosystem. Lien emphasises that the use of becoming “is part of a theoretical shift in anthropology from meaning to practice, also referred to as a turn from representation to performativity” (2015:15). She sees this as not so much a radical shift, “rather a sharpening of our ethnographic awareness to encompass the ways in which our human existence is constituted by the journeys of our consociates” (Lien 2015:15). While Lien focuses on *becoming* to study how salmon are *becoming* domesticated and human-fish interactions, I have used it to study how people are *becoming* entrepreneurs within the start-up
network. Coming home and analysing my data I was inspired by the Actor-Network-Theory (Latour 2005) to see other kinds of actors than humans within this ecosystem. I was further influenced by Gibson (2014: [1979]) and his concept of affordance. Gibson believed that one should not study animals, objects or people in isolation from each other or the environment around them, but rather see the environment and the actors as complimentary of each other (McGreen & Ho 2000). Gibson’s definition of affordance is what the environment offers the actor, “what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (2014: [1979]:56). In what follows, I look into how different actors in the environment, that is to say the start-up ecosystem, give affordance to the entrepreneurs and their start-ups.

**Different forms of capital**

In my analysis I was further inspired by Bourdieu’s different kinds of capital and his concept of symbolic power. Bourdieu identifies social and cultural capital as separate dimensions, along with monetary capital, in his stratification of society into classes. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, “may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” (1986:82); as such cultural capital can be understood as a form of knowledge, skills, taste and other qualifications a person attributes through educational exposure (Thompson 1991:14). This educational exposure includes the knowledge a person gets through schooling and formal education, and upbringing. Cultural capital is therefore shaped by school tuition and family circumstances (Field 2003:14). Social capital on the other hand, is capital in the shape of relationships or memberships within a group (Bourdieu 1986:86). Both cultural, social and economic capital play a part in Bourdieu’s stratification of society into classes.

Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as “nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognized, when it is known through the categories of perception that it imposes” (1989:21). He further explains that “symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition” (Bourdieu 1989:23). My understanding of his definition and usage is that symbolic capital is a form of rank or position that is recognised by others, and that this rank and position gives symbolic power.
In my analysis I will use social capital to describe how the entrepreneurs can benefit from their connections within the start-up network. I will further use it in discussing the followers the media entrepreneur and their platforms have. Followers are used to describe the people that follow you on social media, and I will suggest that they can be seen as digital social capital. I will further discuss how this digital social capital can give the entrepreneurs recognition by others, meaning that they have symbolic capital, and how this symbolic capital may be used as symbolic power to set the agenda and make an impact. Furthermore I will use the concepts of symbolic capital and power to explain how my informants would negotiate rather than break the expectations their parents have of them. Here I will suggest that parents can have symbolic capital and power within the family unit, through their position and rank, which is recognised by their children. Lastly, I will use cultural capital when discussing language. Here I will connected knowledge of English to cultural capital.

**Key Symbols**

During my fieldwork, entrepreneurship and start-ups were both described as being glorified, and as a taboo. To analyse and make sense of this paradox, I used Ortner (1973) description of key scenarios. According to Ortner, “[e]very culture, of course embodies some vision of success, or the good life, but the cultural variation occurs in how success is defined, and given that, what are considered the best ways of achieving it” (1973:1341). She identifies what she calls key scenarios, which is an elaborating symbol that “implies clear-cut modes of action appropriate to correct and successful living in the culture” (1973:1341). The example she gives of one such key scenario in America is the myth of the American dream. This myth has it that a boy named Horatio is poor and of low status, yet by believing in the American system he can work hard and become rich and powerful (Ortner 1973:1341). In my analysis I will use Ortner’s (1973) key scenarios to show that the vision of success for the young generation is different than for their parents’ generation, and I will discuss how this friction affects the social risk for entrepreneurs. I will also use it to explain why there is a dearth of women within the start-up ecosystem, and suggest that women have a different key scenario based on the patriarchal hierarchy. This key scenario also sets up other expatiations than a career trajectory; the female is expected to be what my informants would call a
good girl. This key scenario, as I will show, was challenged by my informants, who were acting as bad girls.

In addition to the key scenario, Ortner describes the elaborating symbol of the root metaphor: “a symbol which operates to sort out experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us think how it all hangs together” (1973:1341). As such, a root metaphor is understood as a metaphor which tells something more about the world, and how things are. In what follows I will suggest that the family can be understood as one such root metaphor for my informants. While my informants would negotiate and challenge their families’ expectations, they all put high value on their families and had respect for their parents.

Methodology

The data I present in this thesis is gathered during a nearly six months’ fieldwork in India’s capital city Delhi. The main methods I used for my data collection have been participant observation, informal conversations, interviews and netnography (Kozinets 2009). I will here describe how my fieldwork went about, my strategies and how I used these different methods to collect my data, before I present some reflections on positioning and ethics.

Entering the Field

I arrived in Delhi to conduct my fieldwork in January 2017, where my plan was to study blogging as a new way of sharing news. Delhi is an enormous city with millions of people, commonly divided into five parts; South-, North-, East-, New- and Central Delhi. I spent most of my time in South Delhi, which was where I lived. I was told by others who had conducted fieldwork in Delhi, that this area was associated with the middle class, which were the main group I wanted to get in contact with. The first person I met in Delhi was Ashita. She was in her early twenties and I had gotten her number prior to fieldwork from a friend of a friend. Since there were no obvious place to hang out and meet bloggers, my strategy was to live in a shared apartment where I could meet people who I hoped would guide me to them. In my second week, I moved into an apartment in
Greater Kailash 1, a relatively expensive area in South Delhi. We were three women who lived in the apartment; Naveena, Neha and me. Naveena was twenty-nine years old and had grown up in Delhi. Neha had moved to Delhi from another city in India and was twenty-four years old. These three women became my guides to the city and its people. Over the course of the fieldwork, they became good friends and important informants. As I was trying to find the bloggers, I used my time to get to know them and their friends, which eventually led me to the start-up network. The time I spent with them also gave me insights into the expectations surrounding women in India, and I observed how they were constantly negotiating and challenging these expectations. This is also something that has become important in my analysis.

**Access to the Start-up Network**

In the prologue I describe how I was invited into my first meeting with the start-up network which changed the direction of my fieldwork and enquires. This was not a fixed field site, rather a huge network spreading throughout the city and its neighbouring cities Noida and Gurgaon, both part of Delhi NCR. Start-ups also come in different shapes and sizes, and none of my informants seemed to agree on a definition of what a start-up actually was. There were tech start-ups, fashion start-ups, media start-ups and the company renting out the apartment where I lived, was also referred to as a start-up. As Arun told me at the start-up hub: “Everything in Delhi is a start-up”.

When I started investigating this phenomenon, a world of media start-ups opened up. I then went to my friends and informants and attempted to figure out which of these start-ups were most relevant in their lives. There were mainly two who came up in most conversations, SpeakUp and WeMedia. However, getting in touch with the entrepreneurs behind them turned out to be difficult. These entrepreneurs were famous within the network and among their audience, which meant that I was not the only one who wanted to meet them. WeMedia had a readership of twenty million people per month, and SpeakUp had five million. I tried to use the network I had gotten so far during fieldwork to get in contact with them, and on this journey I met a lot of other people who became important in my research. Entrepreneurs behind smaller similar media start-ups, journalists who worked for media start-ups and journalists who worked within traditional media.
An important tool in terms of meeting my informants was a closed Facebook group for entrepreneurs and others within the network. I was invited to the group by Neha, and published a post about my project. After this I was contacted by a lot of people within the network, and one of them was Tarun, the entrepreneur behind SpeakUp, who I had tried to get in touch with for a month. He then invited me to his office for an interview, and let me come back to use his office for writing my field notes and meeting the rest of the team. Since Tarun was a well-known person within the network, my connection with him became important for meeting the other successful media entrepreneurs, for example Aarish who was one of the six co-founders behind WeMedia.

**Language**

The people I met during my fieldwork all spoke good English. For everyone it was either English or Hinglish (a combination between the two) they spoke with each other, and when I was present they mostly kept the conversations in English. However, I did attend a crash course in Hindi my first month in the field. Even though I did not need this course to communicate with my informants, it became important for opening up my interest for how my informants used language. What I noticed was that they switched between using English and Hindi in different situations, and I asked a lot of questions surrounding languages. These questions also led me to interesting conversations about language with the media entrepreneurs. Language barriers was a problem for them and their outreach, and they shared their different strategies for tackling this problem. As such, the use of language has become an important part of this thesis.

**Netnography and Bollywood**

Since my initial plan was to study digital blogging, I had prepared a plan for how I would do ethnography online in my collection of data. Markham (2013) points out that when doing digital ethnography one can end up with having too much data, she therefore suggests that one should rather ask *why* one should follow the digital instead of *how*. What can the digital tell, that other types of data gathering cannot? I was inspired by her suggestion both in the preparation and during my fieldwork. The digital platforms I observed posts several stories daily, and reading all of them would deprive me from spending time with my informants. I therefore decided to focus on the stories
surrounding women and women’s sexuality, since my informants talked about this topic. However, as there were a lot of stories posted on that topic, I did not manage to read them all. I visited their websites daily, read the headlines and some stories. I also saved the stories I found most interesting. While I will not use these digital stories directly in my thesis, because of anonymity of the media start-ups, reading them gave me insights into the taboos the media entrepreneurs wanted to break. Additionally, there was a digital campaign under a hashtag that was circling during my fieldwork. To understand what this hashtag was about I followed it for a while and some of the posts will be presented here as data. Additionally, an important topic for investigation in this thesis is what my informants would talk about as a glorification of the start-up network. This glorification, as I was told, was done by digital media platforms that has emerged within the network and in Bollywood. To understand this glorification I followed these platforms and watched the Bollywood movies they referred to. One of these Bollywood movies, Band Baaja Baaraat (Sharma 2010), will be presented in the thesis, together with posts from one such platform to discuss this glorification. There was also another Bollywood movie that came up in a lot of conversations, Lipstick Under My Burkha (Shrivastava 2017) this movie was challenging the taboo surrounding female sexuality. It came out after I had left the field, however, my informants talked a lot about its release during my time in Delhi. Since it was important for my informants and debated on both SpeakUp and WeMedia, I will discuss it in the thesis.

**Interviews**

I did eleven in-depth interviews during my fieldwork. These interviews were with media entrepreneurs, journalists working in start-ups or traditional media, and others who were a part of the network. These interviews gave me important information about the network and media industry, and will be important in my analysis. They all lasted for around one hour or more, and I used a recorder. While I had made an interview guide before the interviews, I let the people I was talking to lead the way the conversation was going. By doing so, I encountered other important questions, and it gave me an understanding of what they regarded as most important. In addition to being important for gathering data, I used the interviews as a strategy to meet more people. After the interviews, I would ask if I could meet them again, and if they could
introduce me to others, a strategy which sometimes worked, and other times did not. All interviews were done in English.

**Participant observation**

In this thesis, I will also present data gathered through participant observation. Participant observation “entails sharing space, events and day-to-day living” (Okely 2012:87). An important space where I did participant observation was in the flat where I lived with Neha and Naveena. We hung out, talked, had friends over for dinner and parties. My informants would also take me along when they were meeting friends; we went to the cinema, parties, events and to restaurants for dinner. During this time, I got insights in how they lived their lives and how it is to be a young woman in Delhi. Further, following the start-up network involved going to different events held for start-ups around the city, and observations from these event has become important data in my analysis. Additionally I spent a week at the SpeakUp office where I got insight into how they ran their organisation. I also used a start-up hub to sit and write my field notes, which gave me a lot of insights into what it meant to become an entrepreneur in Delhi. I observed how they shared their knowledge and contacts with each other, and over time knowledge and contacts was shared with me as well.

**Conversations**

A lot of the data I will present in this thesis where also gathered through informal conversations. I carried my notebook with me wherever I went, and would write down quotes from the conversations I found interesting, about the start-up network, expectations, how it was to be a woman in India, cast etc. In the beginning, I never wrote them down in front of my informants, however, they started asking me to take up my notebook when they had conversations they thought would be of my interest, and sometimes asked me to record. As such, writing during conversations eventually became more natural.

**Positioning**

Conducting anthropological fieldwork means using yourself as a tool, and who you are then becomes important for the direction the fieldwork is going, how your informants see you, and who you meet (Hagen & Skorpen 2016:52). Since I am a young woman, the
people I met in the beginning were also mostly young women. India is a segregated society, and the shared apartments I found online, was either for women or men. As such, living with men was not possible. The men I met was either through my female informants, or within the start-up network. Living with women and seeing how they lived their lives, also made me look further into the expectations they met. That I am from the middle class and came from a foreign country, probably also affected who I met, and how they viewed me.

**Ethical reflections**

When people invite you into their lives and become part of your research, it is important to always have their best interest in mind, follow sufficient ethical guidelines and get their informed consent ([Hagen & Skorpen 2016:177](#)). During my fieldwork, it was important for me to make sure that my informants knew I was doing research, what it would entail to be a part of it, and that they agreed on that basis. While this was usually never a problem, there were some who did not want to be my informants, just my friends and I have respected their wish. Since I was living with people who had agreed to be my informants, it was important for me to remind them now and again. However, this was not a problem since they would also remind by telling me to get my notebook. Also, if I went to parties, I made sure that they knew I was doing research. If something interesting was said at these social gatherings, I asked if I could use it for my research. Even though my informants never asked me to anonymise them or their companies I have chosen to do so, as some of the themes in this thesis are sensitive for my informants. Also, I do not want my writing to affect my informants or their companies in any way.

**Overview of chapter**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will go further into what it means to become an entrepreneur in Delhi. While it is a way to earn money by creating a scalable business, it also means that you are a part of a larger start-up ecosystem. Additionally, for some, it means to rebel against your parents expectations. In the second chapter, I will discuss the stereotypes of the good and the bad girl. While family and society expected my female informants to behave as good girls, they rebelled against their wish was were bad girls. By describing the
bad girl as a performance, I will discuss how my informants and other would change their act according to where they were and who their audience was. Chapter three is about the media start-ups. I will here go deeper into two of the; SpeakUp and WeMedia and the entrepreneurs behind them. While both of these entrepreneurs wanted a change, they had different strategies and motivations. Furthermore, I will go into one of the reason why most of the young journalists I met would rather work in a mediat start-up, than in traditional media. Being the age hierarchy and being able to write what they want. In the final chapter, I will discuss some of the restrictions for the entrepreneurs. The restriction that came up in most of my conversations was language. By publishing in Hindi, these entrepreneurs would only reach a specific part of the population. I will discuss the meaning of this and SpeakUp’s and WeMedia’s different strategies to overcome this barrier. Also, I will discuss the openness of the internet. The media entrepreneurs I met during my fieldwork, were not the only ones who used the digital platform to promote a change. There were also other voices with a different agenda, the Hindu nationalist movement. I will also discuss censorship and freedom of speech briefly.
Chapter 1: Becoming an Entrepreneur

Yeah, there is a very serious mental risk in starting up, which nobody talks about and nobody wants to listen to either. Because that’s just not a good enough narrative. And there is so much glorification around entrepreneurs who’ve made it huge. Everyone wants to be like them without realising that to actually get there you go through a lot of pain. And when they actually get in, it changes them as a person. It’s harmful and good in a way. So yeah” (Tarun)

In India, becoming an entrepreneur means different things. First of all, it is a way to earn money by creating a scalable business. Additionally, as Fredrik Barth (1963) puts it: “The goods which are obtained through entrepreneurial activity are clearly not restricted to purely monetary, or even material, forms, but may take the form of power, rank, or experience and skills; indeed one or more of these forms may be the explicit goal of an entrepreneur” (1963:8). The entrepreneurs are also part of a larger network, referred to as an ecosystem.

The aim of this chapter is to describe this ecosystem, inspired by Actor-Network-Theory (Latour 2005) and Gibson (2014: [1979]), I will describe the different actors, both human and non-human that gives affordance to the entrepreneurs and the network. While there are a lot of different actors within this network, I will focus on the ones that were most important during my fieldwork: investors, mentors, events, pitching sessions, technology, and start-up hubs. Additionally I will explain something I found as a paradox while following the network. On the one hand having a start-up was referred to as glorified and on the other hand as a taboo. I will explain this paradox by using Sherry Orther’s (1973) concept key scenarios, where I found that the key scenarios for my informants were different than for their parents. Lastely I will discuss whether this glorification of the start-up venture is changing.

Money, glamour and coolness
In the quote starting this chapter Tarun is telling me about what was often referred to as a glorification surrounding start-ups. Tarun is the entrepreneur behind the media platform SpeakUp. Becoming an entrepreneur is, according to my informants, a struggle. As Tarun puts it, you go through a lot of pain. This side of the start-up venture is, according to him and others, not a good enough narrative to be told. The stories that do get told are the success stories of founders behind start-ups who have scaled big and earned a lot of money. This glorification of the start-up venture is most present on the many websites dedicated to the start-up community that has emerged as part of the ecosystem of entrepreneurs. Stories like these are posted daily:

"With sales of 3 million units a month, Epigamia shows how a new-age FMCG brand can hook consumers in India” (Nair 2018)

"Five pieces of advice from super-successful women that could make or break your journey” (Shah 2018)

"Meet these homemakers who are now successful owners of a food stall in Kolkata” (Think Change India 2018)

The quotes are taken from one such website called YourStory. The glorification is also present in popular media. In an article on YourStory, a writer (Roy 2015) has suggested movies that entrepreneurs-to-be should watch for inspiration, one of the movies on this list is Band Baaja Baarat (Sharma 2010). The movie is about a young couple from the lower middle-class who starts an enterprise of arranging weddings (Mankekar 2013). As their company grows, so does their social position in society.

According to some of my informants, this way of glorifying the start-up venture makes too many people want to become entrepreneurs. They stressed that this kind of glorification makes it look easier than it actually is. As such, people went into it for the wrong reasons, namely the money, glamour and coolness. When talking to Samaya, who is the CEO of an event managing start-up that later became a media start-up, she said:

I don’t know, like, ask a lot of people but my observation is.. I think a lot of people kind of see the glamour a part of the start-up world. And what some people say is: “Oh, I can’t wait to be my own boss”. That is when I know they’re not ready. I’m like: “Do you know how harrowing it is to be like, you know, the captain of your ship?” You think it is exciting and I feel that
people are in a hurry to get payments before their service or their product or the offering get payments. (Samaya)

What she’s talking about is much of the same as what Arun, who I introduced in the prologue, mentioned when I visited him and Ishan at the start-up hub. That being your own boss is glamorised as having a lot of freedom, fame and money, something Samaya has experienced as not being the case. If freedom, fame and money are the reasons why a person wants to start on their own, she believes they are going to fail because they are not prepared for the hard work behind the scenes. As she says, they want the money (payments) before they have developed the service or a product. In Samaya’s case, her service was event managing.

**Getting success**

By looking at the glorification of the start-up venture, becoming an entrepreneur of a successful start-up can be understood as having success. Also, Forbes magazine gives out a list every year called ‘30 under 30’. This list is of thirty successful people under thirty years old. On the ‘30 under 30’ list from India in 2017 (Forbes India 2017), there are a lot of entrepreneurs. Over half of the people on the list were either CEO’s, founders or co-founders of successful start-ups. This list was often talked about during my fieldwork, and winding up on it was expressed as a goal. On the other hand, my informants would stress that this glorification makes too many people wanting to be a part of it, when the truth was that having a start-up was not as glamorous as it looked. According to Ortner “[e]very culture, of course, embodies some vision of success, or the good life, but the cultural variation occurs in how success is defined, and given that, what are considered the best ways of achieving it” (1973:1341). The way of achieving success she calls a key scenario, an elaborating symbol that “implies clear-cut modes of action appropriate to correct and successful living in the culture” (Ortner 1973:1341). The example she gives to one such key scenario in America, is the American dream and the myth of Horatio. This myth has it that Horatio is poor and of low status, yet by believing in the American system he can work hard and become rich and powerful (Ortner 1973:1341).
Because of the glorification surrounding start-ups in India, I will suggest that becoming an entrepreneur can be understood as one such key scenario. It offers a clear-cut mode to become successful. This clear-cut mode involves going through the various steps of actions to achieve the start-up dream. That is, having an idea, get founding from investors, scale the company and become a successful CEO who is on Forbes '30 under 30' list, and on the other websites dedicated to start-ups, such as YourStory.

Seeing the start-up venture as a key scenario may explain why there are so many people who try to achieve the start-up dream, even if there is a bigger chance of failing than becoming successful. My informants were often telling me that 90% of start-ups fail. In his article about multilevel markets in Mexico, Peter S. Chan (2008) describes how his informant Ezpernansa tried to pursue a career within this market, but never made it to the top. By being exposed to stories from people who did, she kept going, believing that her dedication eventually would “perform the same magic” (Chan 2008:443) for her. In the same way, by neglecting the narratives of failure and struggles within the start-up ecosystem, this myth of entrepreneurship as a way to success, and as a key scenario, is kept alive and seems achievable for a lot of people.

Venture Capitalists, Angels and Unicorns

When Tarun started his start-up venture, he managed to win a competition that gave him a ten thousand dollar grant. This money was, in his words, crucial at that time. Since he didn't have anything else, he made sure that the money would keep his media start-up Speak Up going for a year. After that he started to go to meetings with potential investors. He told me how he probably went to 200-300 meetings, everyone turned him down. Getting money from outside is crucial for most start-ups. When the idea is there, they usually need money to create the right technology and scale the company, paying their employees, and most of all, survive themselves. Since most of the entrepreneurs are young and don't have any chance of getting a loan, a common strategy is to get funding from venture capitalists, angels and unicorns.

Venture capital comes from venture funds, a concept and business strategy that started in New York when wealthy families used their funds to invest in companies and thereby retreat a financial gain when the start-ups made profit. Through their investments they
figured out that it was more effective to go in at an early stage, before the companies had gone public. When the start-ups then went public or had some sort of success, these families “could make a small fortune – and thereby more than make up losses from other venturesome investments” (Draper III 2011:44). This way of investing was soon picked up by other families, and eventually independent venture capital companies emerged. Today most of the “money comes from venture capital partnerships” (Draper III 2011:45). These partnerships consist of limited partners who put in the money, and general partners who do the work (Draper III 2011:45).

In addition to the venture capitalist, there are angel investors, often referred to as *angels*. These angels operate in the same way as venture capitalists without a venture capital company. The money they have is mainly their own, and the investments they make are usually smaller and earlier than the professional venture capitalist (Draper III 52-51). The angels can also be organised in networks, as I observed in Delhi. During the pitching session, which I will describe below, they were also referred to as *unicorns*. Both venture capitalists and angels are present in the start-up ecosystem in Delhi, as described by my informants. While I never met one in person, one of my informants, Chirag, worked for an angel investor network in Delhi, helping them to find potential start-up ventures. He took me to an event they held at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT Delhi). At this event there were two Angels, who told the attending entrepreneurs about their investment strategies. They were both men between thirty and forty years old. Their strategy, as they described to the audience, is to invest in many start-ups and expect most of them to fail or not get any profit. If a couple of them get some profit and some become huge, they will retreat a financial gain from their investments.

**The pitching performance**

A meeting place for entrepreneurs and funders, are events like the one I went to at IIT Delhi. Similar events are frequently held for start-ups around Delhi, where people within the start-up ecosystem come together. There are also pitching sessions, arranged by the venture capital companies and the angel networks. A pitching session is when entrepreneurs are given a limited time frame to sell their start-up idea to potential
investors. In Goffman’s (1969) book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he argues that a social situation can be seen as a performance, where a person acts in line with the perception they want to give to the other people present, being their audience. Following this, I see the pitch as a performance. In the performance of the pitch, the audience are usually investors who will decide whether the entrepreneurs and their start-up venture are worth their money or not and the actors are given a limited timeline to perform. As such, the perception the performer gives within this time is important. Before I go into detail about the relationship between the founders and the entrepreneurs, I will describe a pitching session I attended in Delhi. While pitching sessions are usually closed to outsiders, this one happened during what was called a ‘start-up boot camp’, and all the people who had signed up for the boot camp where allowed to be in the audience.

**The pitching session**

I’m sitting in a lecture hall that can probably fit around 200 people at Delhi Technological University where the event ‘start-up boot camp’ is taking place. On this Saturday morning in early June, we are about 50 people who showed up. A young woman in high-heeled sandals, tight black jeans and a blazer walks out onto the stage, telling the audience that it’s time for the pitching, where entrepreneurs can pitch their start-up to a panel of qualified judges. She introduces the first judge, a women from the UK who is joining us on Skype. She introduces herself by telling us that she’s an entrepreneur and venture capitalist based in London. She goes on to say that her company is very interested in the Indian start-up ecosystem and that she is looking forward to listening to their ideas. The rest of the judges are present in the audience; three men sitting up front, close to the stage, and are introduced after the venture capitalist from the UK. One of them is also a venture capitalist, around fifty years old. The second is in his mid-thirties and is an investor from Unicorn Investors. They are both wearing jeans and a shirt, same as most of the hopeful entrepreneurs in the audience. The third judge is younger and a bit more formally dressed, he’s wearing beige trousers and a blazer with a shirt underneath. We in the audience are told that he has his own successful start-up and helps mentor other start-ups. It seems that he also has a connection with Unicorn Investors. They sit together, and talk amongst themselves.
The first contestant, Sanjit, walks out on stage. He’s wearing blue jeans and a black picket shirt. He starts presenting his start-up, which is a marketing company. His voice is shaking and it’s difficult to hear what he has to say. He’s nervous and it doesn’t help that there is a group of young male students behind me whispering and laughing amongst themselves. He tells us that he has prepared a Power Point presentation and walks over to a computer on the side of the stage to connect it to the projector. There are some technical problems and the host comes to his rescue. After a little while the Power Point is up and he’s back on stage. He still seems very uncomfortable. I don’t know about the rest of the audience, but I have a difficult time understanding what he’s trying to pitch. I look around me and see that most of the people are whispering to each other or looking down at their phones. I feel a bit bad sitting there, knowing how important this performance is for him. Pitching is one of the few opportunities where the investors listens to your idea, therefore being able to pitch is essential for getting money. After he’s finished he gets a half-heartedly applause.

A new contestant walks out on stage. His name is Arun and he presents an app he is creating that is supposed to help people who are self-employed. He’s even more nervous than Sanjit. He stumbles with over his words and his voice and his body are shaking. The group of people behind me are talking louder now, and I fear that Arun can also hear them. Even the judges are whispering and smiling to each other, to me it looks like they are making fun of him. He tells us that he wants to show the app on the screen, so we can see the technology behind it. The host again comes to help. When the app is finally connected to the projector he gets more confident. He might not know how to sell his idea in front of all these people, but he knows the technology he has created. However, his time is up and the host walks up on the stage clapping, interrupting Arun in the middle of a sentence. He says “thank you” and shows Arun off the stage.

Apparently, there are no more people pitching and the women in the high heels tells us that it’s time for the audience to vote between the two. They ask us to log onto their site where they have created a poll. The poll will be shown on screen, so everyone can see. I thought this couldn’t get any worse for Sanjit and Arun who are both standing awkwardly on stage, waiting for the results. Luckily there are some problems with the
poll, so they are not able to go through with the vote. They move on to the judges. The women on Skype says there were some problems with the sound, so she can’t give any feedback. While she’s apologising I can see that the other three judges are talking with one of the organisers. Eventually the older judge takes the microphone and tells us that instead of giving their feedback on the pitching, they will answer questions from the audience. Sanjit and Arun are asked to step down from the stage.

**Takes every chance to pitch**

When the question round started, it became evident that there were other entrepreneurs in the audience who wanted to get the judges’ attention. However, they chose a different strategy than signing up for the pitching session. Most of the questions that are asked the judges, who are now sitting at the end of the stage facing the audience, are very similar. It starts with an introduction of their own start-up or idea for a start-up and then they ask “What should I do?”, “How do I get founding/mentoring?”, “Is this a good idea for a start-up?”. It seems to me that instead of asking questions, they use the opportunity to pitch. They also want to get noticed by the three judges, who can all help them achieve their dreams with founding. However, they were either too nervous to do the pitching performance, or they were more experienced and knew something Arun and Sanjit didn’t, that there are other ways to pitch than going on stage. When the three judges end their session and step down from the stage, people gather around them to give them their business card or to get their e-mail address.

At another event with two angels, the same thing happened. People in the audience gave the two angels their business cards. Additionally, they started to give me their business card as well, thinking I was an investor from abroad. I also noticed that the angels were approached by three people who gave them their business card and pitched their start-up before the event had started. This can be understood by the importance given to connections, or what Bourdieu (1989) calls social capital, within the ecosystem. Social capital is, according to Bourdieu, capital in form of long-lasting relationships and membership within a group (1986:86). These relationships are valued because they can help a person achieve something that would be difficult or not possible without them (Field 2003:1). When people knew a lot of others within the ecosystem, they were usually referred to as “well-connected”. For the entrepreneurs, the connections they
have within the network, can give them access to closed pitching sessions or meetings with investors. One can argue that this access was what the others in the audience knew, that Arun and Sajit did not. By asking questions sounding like a pitch, or handing out their business card, they can get noticed by the judges and get the right kind of social capital that will give them access to these places.

The importance of technology

Furthermore, what happened at the pitching session shows the central role technology plays within the start-up ecosystem. The technology is important to support the actor in the performance of the pitch. For both Sanjit and Arun the technology was important for them to go through with their performance; Sanjit used Power Point and Arun had his app shown on the screen. In other words, the technology was an important prop in the performance. In both the performances the technology was working against them, meaning that there were technological problems and the hosts had to come to their rescue. Since they only have a limited time frame to do their pitch, it can be argued that technological problems like these can make or break the performance. When Arun was pitching, he didn’t make it on time because of the technological problems and his performance was therefore interrupted by the clapping host. Also, by looking at Arun in his performance, it seemed that the technological props were important in boosting his confidence. When the app was on screen, he knew how to perform.

Secondly, technology plays an important role in being a part of a global network. The start-up ecosystem in Delhi is also a part of a larger global ecosystem, where investments across national borders are not unusual (see Draper III 2011). Having the venture capitalist from London as a judge gives the entrepreneurs an opportunity to be a part of this global ecosystem. Before the pitching session we were also given a talk by a venture capitalist in USA who told the entrepreneurs about their global opportunities. Technology such as Skype is an important factor in being part of this global system. Thirdly, we saw how the entire pitching session was disrupted when the technology failed and we, the audience, were unable to vote. Hence, technology might be seen as an important, integrated and distinct actor that gives affordance to the ecosystem and the entrepreneurs.
Power within the ecosystem

Before going to the pitching session, I was told by Chirag and my flatmate Neha that it was important for me to attend one, Neha explained: “you won’t understand their desperation for money and the investors’ attention before seeing a pitching session”. Looking at the pitching session, one can argue that this desperation comes to the surface: Sanjit and Arun, who were trying to give a pitching performance in the hope of getting money from investors, the people who used the following question round to pitch their start-up, and the business cards that were flying around after the event. It seemed as if the investors could pick freely amongst the entrepreneurs who were pitching their start-ups to them. For some, getting money from investors is important to achieve the start-up dream. Before the pitching session started, Sanjit was up on stage telling the audience that he was struggling with his marketing start-up. He told us that he has four people working with him full time. The money he has used so far has been loans from his family and friends, which he had to pay back. It seemed as if the money Sanjits could get from the investors would be important for him to keep his company going. In a sense, the investors decide which people who will get the chance to make it, and who’s going to fail. On the other hand, these investors also need the start-ups in order to exist. At the end of the day, it’s the start-up venture they earn their money on. One can argue that the entrepreneurs and the investors are interdependent on each other. As such, they are both important actors in the ecosystem and the growth of it.

When attending the other event, where the angels talked about their investment strategies, they also told the entrepreneurs what would happen if they decided to give their money to the start-up. Then, as they explained, they want the start-up venture to succeed, and will do what they can to help the entrepreneurs and their team. If the start-up venture becomes successful, the funders will make the financial gain they were hoping for. In that sense, this relationship becomes more reciprocal, as the investor takes on some of the economic risk involved in failing. However, the investors have multiple ventures they have invested in, as explained earlier, and they can lean on these if the start-up fails, unlike the entrepreneur.

Access to entrepreneurial Gurus
As explained, when the start-up is within the scheme, the investor wants them to succeed, so they eventually will give them the financial gain they were hoping for. One of the ways they will help them, as the angels told their audience, is by giving them access to their network of mentors. Looking at other venture capital and angel network websites, it seemed as if this was a common occurrence:

In addition to capitalising the businesses, we are committed to spending time with the entrepreneurs to build market-leading companies. Our investing team’s extensive operating, investing and entrepreneurial experience coupled with the industry and domain expertise from our network of mentors and advisors is what our portfolio companies can leverage in their journey to build success stories.

(Uncorn India Ventures)

“Indian Angel Network is a network of Angel investors keen to invest in early stage businesses which have potential to create disproportionate value. The members of the Network are leaders in the Entrepreneurial Eco-System as they have had strong operational experience as CEOs or a background of creating new and successful ventures. They share a passion to create scale and value for start-up ventures. Started in April 2006, the Indian Angel Network in addition to money, provides constant access to high quality mentoring, vast networks and inputs on strategy as well as execution. The Network members, because of their background are better able to assess the potential and risks at the early stage”.

(Indian Angel Network)

These two quotes are what two different investor networks have written about themselves on their websites. The first is a venture capitalist company, and the second an Angel network. As mentioned, one of the judges at the pitching session was a mentor. He had gained his role as a mentor because he had created a successful start-up, as had most of the mentors I heard of. They were usually retired entrepreneurs with a
successful start-up on their resume. As such, they are people who have been in the game and learned how to play it, and when an entrepreneur becomes a part of an investor network, they get access to their knowledge.

Fredrik Barth (1990) has done a comparative analysis of Gurus in Bali and priests in Papa New Guinea where he looks at how they enhance their status through their knowledge. In the case of the priests in New Guinea, he explains that the “the value of knowledge is enhanced by veiling it and sharing it with as few as possible” (1990:641). Barth (1990) calls these priests conjurers. In Bali, on the other hand “the Guru realizes himself by reproducing knowledge” (1990:642). The task of the Balinese Guru is to “instruct, clarify and educate in his relation with his audience, so that the disciples learn from him, in a personal and enduring relationship” (1990:643). Inspired by Barth’s analysis, I see these mentors as entrepreneurial Gurus. Their task as mentors is to share their knowledge with the becoming entrepreneurs, “to explain, instruct and exemplify” (Barth 1990:642). Within the start-up network, the Entrepreneurial Gurus, as the Balinese Guru, improve and gain their status by reproducing their knowledge. Looking at the Entrepreneurial Guru at the pitching session, his experience gave him the knowledge, and his knowledge became valuable by sharing it with others as a mentor. In this way he improved his status and position in the ecosystem; by being a mentor he sat on the opposite side of the pitching session.

Start-up India

In addition to the venture capitalists and angels, the government in India has a program that offers start-ups financial support. This is an option for the entrepreneurs. However, most of the people I spoke to did not want to get involved with it. When talking to Tarun, he said:

So, see, they set out some money, and they’ve said that, okay we’re going to fund some businesses with this much amount, and this is the kind of support that we’re going to provide. But, when you are dealing with a system that is sustainably bureaucratic and actually has been designed to make sure you don’t grow, you can’t really utilise that system to grow. And that’s why many entrepreneurs I know don’t want to even touch the start-up India
programme that the government is running, because they feel that the moment they get involved it’s going to get stuck. It’s so much trouble they have to go through to get what they want to get. (Tarun)

What Tarun here states can be understood within the frame of India’s economic rise since the neoliberal reforms and liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991. As David Harvey points out, an important aspect of neoliberalism is to promote entrepreneurial freedom with a free market, free trade and private property rights (2005:2). Since the country has experienced an enormous economic growth following less state intervention, it could be argued that the state represents a system which, as Tarun states, is designed to make sure you don’t grow. As such, there is a perception that an entrepreneur has more chance to make a scalable business by believing in the neoliberal private market, as such the state does not fit into the key scenario. This belief might be the reason why some entrepreneurs are willing to do anything to get the attention of the investors, instead of trying to get support from the government.

The hubs

In the prologue, I described how my first meeting with the start-up network was when I met Ishan and Varun at the start-up hub where they work. These hubs are co-working spaces where a lot of young people start their journey to become entrepreneurs. The number of hubs in Delhi has grown in accordance with the ecosystem, and today there are several of them in and around the city. During my fieldwork I was able to visit two of these hubs. The hub where Ishan and Varun were working was designed as an open office space surrounded by meeting rooms with glass walls, where fifty different start-ups work. Although I was only able to visit this hub once, Ishan and Varun told me that they regularly host various kinds of events with well-known Entrepreneurial Gurus and investors. They also had an Entrepreneurial Guru of their own; he had been in the game for a long time, and was now working on a new app. Because of his experience and knowledge, Varun and Ishan told me that they would often go to him for advice. Ishan emphasised that this hub had been important in the development of his marketing start-up venture. He claimed he would spend eighteen hours a day working there, and over time he had also encountered people who have influenced him on his way and become a part of his network. For example Varun, who used to work for the hub and
had recently quit his job to become part of Ishan's team. Ishan explained that he had met Varun at the hub. Ishan used the hub to work on his marketing start-up and Varun was working for the start-up hub's own team; after a little while Varun quit his job to work with Ishan and his start-up. Working together, Varun has introduced Ishan to new technology and possibilities. As such, I will argue that the hubs can be seen as actors within the start-up network that gives affordance to the entrepreneurs and their start-ups. It's worth mentioning that the hubs were also referred to as a start-up.

The second hub was more casual than the one where Ishan and Varun worked. In addition to being a co-working space, it was also a restaurant, bar and nightclub. It was located in a place that was often referred to as the hipster area in Delhi, Hauz Khaas Village. I had visited the restaurant and nightclub many times with my informants before realising there was a co-working space on the second floor. At this hub there were both regulars, meaning that they were there daily, and others who used the hub now and again; some I only saw once. As I spent more time there I got to know the regulars. When talking to them about working at the hub, most of them expressed that they felt they were a part of a community working there. They explained that they helped each other with their start-up ventures, by either sharing their contacts within the ecosystem, helping with developing technology or by making strategies for scaling the business.

The co-working space had its own terrace; it was relatively small with one table. People used this terrace to smoke or just take a break from work. Since people were usually working inside, I spent most of my time out here where people would usually talk. Sitting there and hanging out with the people who were taking breaks, I noticed that both contacts and knowledge were frequently shared. The reason why people would share with each other, rather than keeping their information to themselves, can be understood by looking at how the Entrepreneurial Gurus who would gain and reproduce their position within the ecosystem. For them their knowledge was valuable to others, and they gained and reproduced their position by sharing it with becoming entrepreneurs. It can be argued that by sharing, rather than revealing, what you know can enhance your status also at the start-up hub. On the other hand, one can argue that by sharing what they knew and their contacts, they were hoping to get something back.
In Marcel Mauss’ (1954) *The Gift* he describes how when a person receives a gift, he or she is expected to give something back in return; as such a gift is an expression of reciprocity. At the start-up hub, the contacts and knowledge shared can be understood as a gift given to the other entrepreneurs, and as such it is an expression of reciprocity where they expect and hope to get the same gift in return.

**Social risk and parents’ key scenario**

While I’ve focused mostly on the economic risk involved in starting up an enterprise, I will here highlight the social risk that exist for the entrepreneurs-to-be. In Barth’s account of entrepreneurship in Northern Norway, he argues that there is a social cost when starting an enterprise:

> “to understand properly the balance-sheet of an enterprise, social cost of various kinds which are not readily recognized as economic must be considered. As in the case of the entrepreneur’s gains, his losses may also include vital intangibles like power, rank, and goodwill” (Barth 1963:8).

Before Chirag got the job for the angel network, he had tried to create his own consulting start-up that failed. When Chirag was telling me about this experience, he said “you’re not just failing businesswise, you also fail socially (…) people criticise you, and you risk your own social life”. It took him six months to recover from this experience. One of the social risks which both he and others brought up was pressure from family. Tarun told me how he had to go through a lot of pressure from his extended family when he first started his start-up venture. They believed he was wasting his time and that he should rather get an education. What kept him going, he told me, was that his parents was supportive. This is not the case for everyone. Tarun told me about friends of his who caved in to the pressure.

> “You know I have friends who quit their start-ups. Everything was going fine with them, but their parents were never supportive. You know, they were at the verge of cracking million dollar deals and becoming really successful, but then they just quit. So that is a very real challenge as well”.

(Tarun)
On one hand, the start-up venture was talked about as being glorified and that too many people wanted to become entrepreneurs. On the other hand, it was referred to as a taboo. Before Tarun told me about his friends who had quit their start-up, he emphasised that a lot of parents want their children to be either lawyers, doctors or get a government job, and would pressure their children to get the right education that lead to these jobs. This kind of pressure regarding career trajectory and education was mentioned by most of my informants. They explained that their parents wanted them to get a risk-free job.

Earlier in this chapter I looked at how becoming an entrepreneur can be understood as a key scenario. This paradox can be explained by looking at another key scenario, the key scenario of the parents’ generation. When they grew up, before the liberalisation of the economy, getting a government job was considered success. A person with a government or another white-collar job receives a steady income and pension, and supplies a regular household income. When Sarah Dickey (2010 [2002]) describes an arranged marriage, she highlights that a man with a government job expected a higher dowry than others. When her informants were trying to find a suitable husband for their daughter Anjali, they would rather pay the higher dowry so she could get married to a man with a government job, rather than a businessman (Dickey 2010 [2002]). Being married to a government employee, would give their daughter a successful life with a regular household income.

In more recent anthropological writings, David Sancho (2013) shows how this key scenario is still important for middle class parents, even though they to a certain extent have embodied the enterprise culture. The parents he interviewed while doing fieldwork in Kerala stressed that their children are free to do whatever they want, and that they have a lot more opportunities than their generation had while growing up. Their aspirations for their children coincided with the aspirations in the youth discourse of the enterprise culture in India. However, he argues that the parents attain to curtain “practices aimed at ensuring their children’s educational success and entrance into specific professions, perceived as secure and as garnering substantial wealth in the global labour market” (Sancho 2013:160). He calls these practices authoritarian educational practices, which involves, among other arrangements,
sending their children to private school and different kinds of extra tutoring to ensure
their acceptance to the top universities. While these parents said that their children
were free to do whatever they wanted, the list of degrees endorsed by these parents
were limited (Sancho 2013:169). They wanted their children to pursue professional
degrees that were “seen as sources of wealth and status” (Sancho 2013:168). He
mentions professions such as medicine, law, chartered accountancy and engineering
(with a following MBA) (Sancho 2013:168). All professions that are associated with
stability. Since the entrepreneurial dream is filled with risk and uncertainty, this key
scenario challenges the old key scenario where stability and steady income is
considered success. Sancho (2013) also describes how the parent’s middle-class status
is reproduced through their children (2013:163). Following this, when children peruse
the key scenario of the entrepreneurial dream, their parents’ status is also at risk.

The struggling entrepreneur, a changing narrative?

As mentioned, before the pitching session, Sanjit was up on stage telling the audience
that he was struggling with his start-up. The host of the event had asked the audience
“are there anyone here who thinks it’s easy to start your own company?” When looking
around me, I saw that no one raised their hands, and most people were shaking their
heads. The host went on to say “of course it’s not easy, but do you know how difficult it
is?” People kept shaking their heads, and the host asked if there were any struggling
entrepreneurs who could join him up on stage and share their story. Eventually Sanjit
raised his hand and went up on stage, from where he shared his story. He shared that he
had quit his job eight months ago to make his marketing company and that he had four
employees working with him full time. He had gone to other pitching sessions, but no
one had given him money yet. After he finished his story, he received applause and
walked down from the stage, back to his seat.
As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, most of my informants would talk about
the glorification of the start-up venture, and that the struggling period was rarely talked
about. However, at the start-up boot camp, the struggling entrepreneur was put on
stage. Additionally, after the question round the Entrepreneurial Guru said to the
audience before leaving “remember guys, start-up is not cool, it’s a lot of work”. Also at
the event with the Angel Network, one of the angels dedicated most of his time on stage
to talk about failure. He said to the audience “what I will talk about now is something that is rarely talked about, I will talk about failing”. I will argue that these examples can be understood as a symbol of a changing narrative. Meaning that the narratives of the struggling period and failing are talked about rather than neglected, as my informants thought was making too many people want to be a part of it. That this narrative of glorification is changing can also explain why most of the people I met wanted to talk about this glorification, and emphasised that the other side of the story should get more attention.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have described the different actors within the start-up network that gives affordance to the ecosystem and the entrepreneurs. I have also looked into the paradox I found when looking through my empirical data; that start-up and entrepreneurship was talked about as both a taboo, and as being glorified. I have argued that this can be understood by looking at young and older generations’ conflicting views on success and the good life, where I have used Ortner’s (1973) concepts key scenarios. I have here suggested two such key scenarios; one is to become an entrepreneur, and the other is to get a risk-free job with a steady income. Since these two key scenarios are conflicting, there is a social risk for the entrepreneurs. I have also argued that the narrative of glorification is changing. I have not addressed the gender aspect of the ecosystem, which I will do in the next chapter. I will then discuss whether there is another key scenario, which poses more of a social risk for women. I will also go further into other expectations of women, and how my informants would challenge these expectations on a daily basis.
Chapter 2: The Bad Girl

Then, for women the expectations are worse. Obviously because it is a patriarchal society. So it’s more difficult, because a women can’t go out before a certain age. After a certain age, if she goes out, she has to come back at a certain time. If she’s done with her education, her parents need to figure out how to get her married (Tarun)

According to Tarun, quoted above, the patriarchy in India assign different expectations to women and men. The aim of this chapter is to describe how my female informants were constantly juggling between expectations from their family and society in general. They used the term good girl when describing the woman they should be, they, on the other hand, were bad girls. This chapter is also meant to give background into one of the taboos the media start-ups want to break – female sexuality and patriarchal gender roles. I will also discuss a hashtag #PinjraTod that came up in a lot of conversations during my fieldwork. This hashtag is a campaign against curfew put on female students. I will start the chapter by discussing the gender aspect of the start-up ecosystem, and how the key scenario for women is different than for men. I will then go further into the distinction between the good and the bad girl. Furthermore I will look at how my informants would negotiate their freedom with their parents and discuss the value and symbolic power in the family. As I did with the pitching session in the last chapter, I will here describe the good and the bad girl as a performance, following Goffman (1969).

Gender aspect of the ecosystem

As I was following the start-up ecosystem, I noticed that most of the people I met and saw were men. At the start-up boot camp we were around fifty people in the audience, out of those, only three were women, including myself. At the event with the angel investors we were seven women out of around forty people. This ratio was a common occurrence. However, some of my entrepreneur informants were women. Shomita, for example, who I introduced in the previous chapter. When Chirag was telling me about the social risks involved in creating a start-up, he emphasized that this was worse for
women. Another female informant within the start-up ecosystem was Radhika, who contacted me through the Facebook group. Radhika was in the process of starting her own media start-up, and told me about her experience when she told her parents:

> When I told my parents that I wanted to start up, they just couldn’t wrap their heads around it, they were like “But you will get married in a few years, what are you going to tell your in-laws”. Finally, I’m now engaged to a person who is also an entrepreneur, who is extremely supportive. I mean, we are in this wonderful equal relationship and everything. He became the mediator between me and my parents. Yeah, and when he said it, and when his family said that “You know, we have no problems, she can do whatever she wants.”, now my parents have come around. (Radhika)

That the pressure is worse for women can be explained by looking at the patriarchal hierarchy in India that assign different social roles to men and women. While men are seen as the heads of the family, they are the decision makers and breadwinners, women are responsible for the domestic domain and reproductive tasks (Nielsen & Waldrop 2014:2). As such, it can be argued that what Ortner (1973) describes as key scenarios to success, is different for women. This key scenario being that she should become a housewife. While becoming an entrepreneur for a man breaks with the key scenario of stability, as discussed in the previous chapter, if he is successful he can still provide for his family, as is the role of the man. For a women, on the other hand, by becoming an entrepreneur she breaks with both the key scenario to success and her role as a wife and mother. Also, as Tarun is saying in the quote starting this chapter, the patriarchal society has more expectations for women. In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss these expectations and how my female entrepreneurs would negotiate and rebel against them. When talking about a woman who succumbs to the expectations society and her family has for her, my informants would use the term *good girl*. They, on the other hand, were *bad girls*, meaning that they did everything a good girl should not do.

**Good girl vs bad girl**

The first time I heard the distinction between a good girl and a bad girl was three weeks into the fieldwork when I went to dinner with my informant Ashita and her college
friends, Madia and Dipti. We were going to dinner in Paharganj, a neighbourhood in Central Delhi known for its main market with many cheap motels and small shops attracting backpackers from around the world. The market is filled with people, auto rickshaws and animals, cows, dogs and camels. On our way to the restaurant, the driver of the auto rickshaw we had taken from the nearest metro station, and Madia came into a quarrel. Madia thought he was charging us too much for the ride because I, a foreigner, was in the group. It resulted in him dropping us off at the wrong location and we had to walk the rest of the way. Madia took charge and guided us through the many narrow, dark streets surrounding the market in Paharganj with GPS on her phone. The neighbourhood we walked through was a shady area, my new friends told me. When we got to the right location, Madia asked me if I had noticed how people were looking at us on our way there. Since I was a bit scared while we walked, and tried my best to keep up with the others who were in a hurry to get out of there before the sun went down, I had not paid attention to the stares.

*They look at us to see whether we are good girls or bad girls. They look at how we move, what we wear, what we talk about and what we do. It tells them who we are and where we come from. People are very judging in India.* (Madia)

During dinner, Ashita, Madia and Dipti tell me that the term good girl is used when describing young women who succumb to the expectations their parents and society have of them and behave accordingly. Reena Patel has also written about the term good girl in her study of the telecommunications industry. She describes the good girl as “a women who is ‘proper’ and ‘keeps to her place’” (Patel 2014:22). Important in Patel’s article is that a woman should not be outside during the night. If she is, she can be viewed as a bad girl, someone who ‘asks for it’ if she is met with violence (2014:22). Not being out at night was also one of the qualities of the good girl when described by my informants. In addition, a good girl should wear traditional clothing, stay away from alcohol, cigarettes and boys. Ashita, Madia and Dipti also emphasised that what a good girl is, will vary according to class and caste because every family has different expectations. When rebelling against these rules, a woman is a bad girl.
When I get to talk more with Ashita about this on a different occasion, she tells me that she is from a very traditional family. She grew up in a small town in North East India, and moved to Delhi by herself three years ago to study English literature. For her parents, who want her to have an arranged marriage at a proper age, her reputation is important. What she does when it comes to education and how she behaves in the big city impinges on her reputation. Therefore, they want her to behave as a good girl. Ashita, on the other hand, enjoys the freedom of living away from her parents and does everything a good girl should not do behind her parents back. She smokes, she drinks alcohol, she sometimes goes to parties, she has a lot of male friends and has had a boyfriend. In the city she behaves as a bad girl. Ashita also tells me that she doesn’t plan to marry at all. She has not told her parents about this yet, and believes it’s going to be a struggle. However, she has an aunt who is unmarried and hopes she will help her negotiate this when the time comes.

**Negotiating freedom**

When I met Shomita for the first time she told me that she and all her female friends had learned to manipulate their parents at an early age. I met Shomita randomly at a café during my second week in Delhi. I was sitting by myself writing my field notes when she asked if she could share my table. She was very interested in what I was doing in India and we ended up talking for a long time. I later visited her at the university and met some of her friends. Like Ashita, Shomita doesn’t want to get married through an arranged marriage. While Ashita is planning to negotiate this with her parents, Shomita tells me that she doesn’t have that option. Shomita lives with her family in Delhi and doesn’t have the same freedom as Ashita.

Even though her parents are strict and do everything in their power to ensure that Shomita acts like a good girl, she has had two boyfriends behind her parents back. She believes that her mother has known, but that she chooses to look the other way. Her mother had helped her sister get married through a love marriage a couple of years earlier. Her sister had fallen in love and luckily he was from the same cast. Then their mother staged an arranged marriage behind their father’s back, which she did with help
from their older brother. Until this day, he still does not know that they had met before their families arranged a meeting between them.

Negotiating her freedom was not unfamiliar for Ashita either. When I met her she had recently quit collage, something her parents were against. She told me that her parents regarded education as a privilege, and as such, they did not understand why she wanted to quit. Also, as mentioned earlier, her parents viewed a good education as important for her reputation. For now she has told her parents that she is on a break and is going back after a year. This had to wait because she was on another mission when I met her, she wanted to move out of the student hostel where she lived. She wanted to live in an apartment so she could get more freedom. Her parents, on the other hand, don’t want her to move out of the hostel. Two weeks after I left the field site, I attended Ashita’s housewarming party in the shared apartment she eventually moved into.

**Family as a root metaphor and parents symbolic power**

The reason why Ashita and Shomita would negotiate, rather than just do what they wanted to do, can be explained through the value they and my other informants put on their family. In a conversation I had with my flatmate Neha, she told me that family is very important in India. Just like Ashita, Neha had moved to Delhi from another city in India, and behaved in a different manner in Delhi, meaning she would be a bad girl. The reason she would not act the same back home where her parents lived, she explained, was not just because they would not approve, it was more out of respect for them. As opposed to Ashita’s and Shomita’s parents, Neha’s parents were for a ‘love’ marriage, however, Neha told me that her family’s opinion would matter when she eventually was going to pick a husband. This, as she explained, was because in India families marry each other. Further, she tells me that people would sometimes choose the family instead of the husband, when marrying. Meaning they would rather choose a ‘bad’ husband with a ‘good’ family, instead of the other way around. This was because a good family will influence their son to be a good husband. What Neha told me also resonates with what Shomita said during our conversation about marriage. As mentioned, Shomita was dreading to get married arranged. She explained that she was scared because she could wind up with a bad husband who would not treat her right. She gave examples of friends of hers who ended up in bad marriages where the husband either cheated or
treated them badly. Shomita therefore, hoped her parents would find someone with a good family. If the family is good, their son is usually also good, she told me.

Family was also important when classifying others. When I was talking with Tarun, the founder of the media start-up SpeakUp about these expectations, he claimed that how a person thinks and what their ideology is, is defined by the hierarchy within the family. He further explained: “If your parents are extremely progressive, you will turn out to be extremely progressive. If your parents are extremely regressive, you will turn out to be extremely regressive. That’s how it is”. Regressive being to uphold the hierarchies. Also, when I asked Naveena about this, she said that progressive means that parents allow you to do what you want. Looking at the importance given to family, and the perception that parents determine if a person is progressive or not, I will suggest that the family can be understood as a type of root metaphor. Ortner describes the root metaphor as “a symbol which operates to sort out experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us think how it all hangs together” (1973:1341). While this is probably not the only root metaphor, it was important for my informants when sorting out their experience with others, and explaining how things are.

Looking closer at the family, and why my informants would negotiate their expectations rather than break them, one can argue that the parents have what Bourdieu (1989) describes as symbolic power. Parents gain this power through their symbolic capital within the family, meaning that their position and rank is recognized by their children. According to Bourdieu “Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition” (1989:23). While Bourdieu uses symbolic capital and power to explain how social classes are made and reproduced in the social space, I will use it here to explain how the hierarchy within the unit of the family is made and reproduced. Also, the parents’ symbolic power can explain the importance in negotiating their expectations.

**Freedom and restrictions**

Talking with Ashita she told me she had more freedom to rebel against her parents’ expectations when living in the city. She explained that her parents can’t know what she is doing, therefore she can do things that they normally would not approve of. However,
she tells me that her mother calls her a lot wondering where she is and what she is doing. This was different for Shomita, who lives with her parents in Delhi. As she, and others told me, when an un-married woman is living in the same city as her parents, it does not look good if she lives by herself. Living with her parents restricted her freedom because they had a rule that she had to be home from university before her father came home from work. Hence, she couldn't hang out with her friends in the evening or go to parties, as Ashita could.

Restrictions for female students

Even though Ashita had more freedom in the city to behave as a bad girl without her parents knowing, there was another factor that restricted her freedom. Student housing in Delhi and, from what I heard, most of India are segregated. Men and women stay in separate buildings or dorms. While the men can come and go from their rooms or apartments as they please, women have a curfew. The doors are closed at a certain time, and Ashita tells me that the guards will call their parents if they come back after the doors are closed. The reason for this curfew is said to be because the city is unsafe for women after dark. The doors at Ashita’s hostel close at 9.30 pm. However, Ashita and her friends had strategies to rebel against this rule. When I went with Ashita and her friends to a theatre on a Saturday evening, they had plans to go to a party afterwards. Since I knew they all had to be back at the student hostel before the doors closed, I asked how they were planning to get around this curfew. Ashita then explained that they sometimes just don’t come back at all. If they don’t come back, the guards won’t register that they broke the curfew. This night, Ashita and the others had plans to stay over at their friend Kamal’s apartment. Kamal lived alone, and there were a lot of people who had planned to stay there throughout the night.

The fact that the student hostel “lock girls inside” was the main reason Ashita brought up when telling me that she wanted to move out of the hostel. To her parents, on the other hand, she gave other reasons. For example, that she wanted to move closer to work and friends. Ashita told me that this curfew is important for her parents because they worried about her safety, and when she lived at the hostel they knew she was safe inside when the darkness comes, they also had more control in terms of her reputation.
As mentioned, Ashita managed to negotiate this, and moved to a shared apartment before I left. The housewarming party was the first party Ashita hosted in Delhi. Having a party at the student hostel had not been possible because of the segregation and curfew. Living by herself, she could invite all her friends, both from university and her workplace, men and women.

#PinjraTod

When Ashita told me about the curfew, she explained that it had caused a lot of debate. There are a lot of students demonstrating, and there is a campaign going under the name of Pinjra Tod, which means break the cage in Hindi. In an interview put on the online video platform YouTube, one of the women running the campaign said “we are not going to accept this laxman rekhas that you offer us, because we, the women, are beyond these Laxman Rekhas” (Mukherjee 2017). When I asked my flatmate Neha about the meaning of the term Laxman Rekhas she told me that it is a reference to the Indian mythology text Ramayana. Here the god Ram makes a boundary around his wife Sita when they are out in the jungle to hunt. This boundary was made to protect her, when she was inside the boundary no one can harm her. The term Laxman Rekhas, comes from God Ram’s brother whose name is Lakshmana who would protect her. She explains that in the Pinjra Tod context, the term is used to show that women are kept within a boundary of the four walls of their room at the student hostel, which does not protect them, rather it curbs their freedom. Also, when the campaign leader says “we are beyond these Laxman Rekhas” one can argue that she’s making a reference to the fact that women are now beyond needing protection from men. This campaign operates in the digital space under the hashtag #PinjraTod on twitter. Here, the Pinjra Tod Twitter user encourages women to share their experiences:

We are an autonomous collective of women fighting against regressive hostel rules and regulations which lock up women! Share your stories with us. #PinjraTod

To show how women have used this hashtag, I have taken two posts that have been shared with the hashtag. These posts have been posted by public users on Twitter:
This Women's Day let's not celebrate women's lives as mothers, sisters & daughters. It's time to shout #PinjraTod. We do not need protecting because #WeAintNoCindrella but we demand safe spaces where people irrespective of their gender can travel, work, have fun & yes loiter

#PinjraTod I stand with all of my beautiful sisters in Mumbai fighting for the right to be able to wear what they want when they want. Its time to break the cage! Fuck the patriarchy!!

These hashtags show how women use the hashtag to shed light on a system they experience as discriminating and restricting their freedom. In Rosa and Bonilla's (2015) article about hashtag activism, they investigate the #Ferguson campaign in the aftermath of Michael Brown’s killing. Michael Brown was an African American man, shot and killed by the police. They here argued that Twitter became a space where people who normally do not have a public voice, could share their feeling of discrimination. The hashtag also evolved into more hashtags that not only demonstrated against the murder of Michael Brown, but also historical systematic discrimination against African Americans in USA (Rosa & Bonilla 2015). In regards to #PinjraTod, by posting on Twitter, student women usetheir voice to discuss and shed light to this rule they see as discriminating against women. Also, in the last hashtag the user writes “fighting for the right to wear what they want when they want”, which can indicate that the hashtag has evolved to mean more than breaking curfew, she here also sheds some light to the bad girl stereotype. After I left the field, the world witnessed another such hashtag, #MeToo. This hashtag was also shared by most of my informants, with regards to Pinjra Tod and other systematic discrimination against women.

The bad girl performance

I was sitting in the car with Naveena and one of her friends on our way home from a party. When we stopped at a gas station we saw a girl running out of the car in front of us, into the gas station’s restroom. When she went into the restroom, she was wearing clothes that covered her legs and shoulders. When she came out, she had changed into a short skirt and a shoulder-less top. Witnessing this, Naveena and her friends burst out in laughter, “typical good girl going from dinner with her parents to a party”. During my fieldwork, I noticed that my informants and others would behave and look more as a
good girl in some situations than others. When I described the pitching session in the previous chapter, I looked at how the pitch was a critical performance given to the investors, in line with Goffman’s (1969) description of the role one plays in a social situation. Important in Goffman’s (1969) description of a performance, is that a person preforms a role every day, in every social situation. Further, the role one plays will be in accordance with the perception they want to give to their audience. When watching the girl at the gas station, we in the car believed she was coming from a dinner with her parents. A social situation where she probably wanted her audience to perceive her as a good girl. As such, she used the proper props to give this performance. These props being the good girl clothes that cover her legs and arms. The social situation we believed she was heading to, was a party. A social situation where she wanted the bad girl to come to the front stage (Goffman 1969).

The act

In the recent Bollywood movie *Lipstick Under my Burkha* (Shrivastava 2017) we meet a young Muslim woman, Rehana, living in Bhopal, a city in the Indian state Madhya Pradesh. In the movie, Rehana acts as a good girl when she’s at home, she wears her burkha and does not go outside after dark. When she is in college on the other hand, her performance as a bad girl comes to the front stage. She has her bad girl costume underneath her burkha, which she takes off after leaving her parents’ house. She also sneaks out after her parents have fallen asleep to go to parties where she drinks and smokes. In the movie, her act as a bad girl is also important for her membership in the group with the other bad girls, who accept her because of her bad girl performance. In the movie, we also meet three other bad girls. A women who is engaged to be married in an arranged marriage, yet has an affair with a photographer; a widow who rediscovers her sexuality when falling for her young swimming instructor; and a wife who is raped by her husband and takes birth control pills without him knowing, to not get pregnant.

The four female characters in this movie, were all bad girls in different ways. However, the act of the young Muslim woman Rehana, has most resemblance to my informants’ acts, as they are in the same age group. Looking at Rehana’s bad girl performance also gives an example of the different props a bad girl can use in her performance. By props,
I am referring to the clothes, cigarettes and alcohol, which distance her from the good girl. By using these props, she shows other people that she is a bad girl, and is therefore accepted among the other bad girls at her college. When she is back home with her parents on the other hand, these props are left backstage. Home is a different social situation with a different audience; her parents.

This movie came out in India a couple of weeks after I left the field. My informant talked a lot about it, and told me it was a controversial film. It was first shown in 2016 at the Tokyo Film Festival where it received the award ‘Spirit of Asia’ and at the Mumbai Film Festival where it was awarded for best film on gender equality. After this, as I was told, the movie was banned in Indian cinema because of its sexual nature. However, after much debate, the movie finally was allowed to be on screen.

**Bad girl and space**

Back at the gas station, when Naveena and her friend looked at the licence plate of the car, they saw that the woman was from Haryana. Haryana is Delhi’s neighbouring state, they said “ahh, the car is from Haryana, that makes sense”. When I asked what they meant, they told me that people from Haryana are usually more regressive. Regressive being that they uphold the patriarchal and cast hierarchy. As such, they were not surprised that she had to perform the good girl act when she was home.

In Delhi, there are also places that are perceived as more regressive than others are. The women I lived with taught me that the bad girl props had to be more toned down in some places, and other places not present at all. Before going out I usually went to them to get advice on what to wear. I then learned that when going to malls, nightclubs and private events the bad girl costume was appropriate and sometimes even expected. For example, one time when I was going dancing with my flatmates and wore a shirt with loose pants, I got the comment “you look like an old auntie wearing that, we’re going to a party!”. Moving in public, on the other hand, the clothing options are more restricted. There was also a line drawn between the places in South Delhi and in North Delhi. Neighbourhoods in South Delhi are usually more expensive, and associated with the middle class, where there were more possibilities for dressing as a bad girl. North Delhi, on the other hand, was talked about as more regressive. Ashita’s hostel was located in a
neighbourhood in North Delhi, and she told me that she usually wore more traditional clothing because she lived there. This, as she told me, was because she was afraid she would be shamed by Hindu nationalist supporters if she dressed as a bad girl.

**The risky bad girl act**

While Ashita was scared of being shamed when acting as a bad girl, she also told me that Delhi has a reputation for being the rape capital of India. Fear of rape and sexual harassment was shared among all my female informants. Because of this fear, they took precautions when staying out after dark. For example, they usually shared cabs when going home, or drove themselves. By cabs, I mean either Uber or Olaa. These cab services are operating on apps, so the passenger can keep track of the ride on their phone. Uber and Olaa were considered safer than a regular taxi or auto rickshaw. Even though these cabs were considered safe, my informants never took them alone during the night. They either shared the cab or drove themselves.

When talking about this with Shomita, she stressed her belief that the reason for the rapes is that women using the public space threaten men. Men, according to her, were afraid of losing the power given to them by the patriarchy. This, according to her, was why there were so many rapes because the men raping wanted to take back their power.

In the documentary *India's Daughter* (Udwin 2015) about the brutal gang rape of the young women Joyti Sing on a bus in Delhi in 2012, the director interviews one of the rapists. He here states that Joyti herself was to blame for the rape. She was outside with her boyfriend after dark, wearing western clothes, as such she was considered a bad girl, and because of her performance she deserved the treatment he and the other rapist gave her. Also, after the members of an Hindu right-wing activist group called “Sri Ram Seva” (meaning foot soldiers of Lord Ram) (Kapur 2012:2) went into a pub in Mangalore in South India and violently attacked and molested the women inside, the founder of the group stated: “Whoever has done this has done a good job. Girls going to pubs [sic] is not acceptable. So, whatever the Sena members did was right” (Kapur:2012:2). According to Banjeree (2005), the Hindu nationalist movement is built on the importance of the Hindu family. For them, a women who does not fulfil her
cultural duty of being a modest wife and mother will hurt the family, and by extension the nation (2005:131).

Also, Kapur (2012) has done an analysis of how the law affects Indian feminism and the view on women. In her analysis she argues that when the wave of feminism came to India, and laws surrounding violence against women were debated, India were in favour of distinguishing from Western feminism. This desire, according to Kapur (2012), “influenced by the politics of anti-colonial nationalism” (2012:4). Within the law, they then followed what she calls dominant feminism, which builds on protectionism rather than equal rights. This feminism fitted with the perception of ‘Indian womanhood’, which was built on the idea that “women were self-sacrificing, dutiful, honourable, heterosexual and, most importantly, chaste” (Kapur 2012:5). This idea of ‘Indian womanhood’ has a striking resemblance to the good girl described by my informants. Kapur (2012) also shows how this form of dominant feminism also was indorsed by Hindu right-wing women. Further, she argues that, since this dominant feminism and idea of Indian womanhood influenced the laws surrounding violence against women, women who do not fit within the Indian womanhood framework, do not deserve protection of the law (Kapur 2012). Finally, she traces this as a reason why young people in India don’t endorse feminism. However, on her last point, my empirical data shows otherwise. In fact, all my informants identified as feminists, and their version of feminism was that men and women deserve equal rights and opportunities. For example, the founder of the media platform SpeakUp, Tarun, explained that his start-up was a feminist organisation, and that was the reason behind their community guidelines, that I will explain further in the next chapter. Also, when I asked Aarish, the co-founder of the media start-up WeMeida about this, he said:

With the kind of inequality that exists in India, I think both men and women have to be feminist. I think women deserve every right to be equal and get the same kind of rights and opportunities. I think as young India, you don’t have a choice. You have to be feminist. (Aarish)

Aarish is here giving a different definition of feminism than the dominant feminism. He also stresses the importance for the young generation in India to be feminists.
Summary

In this chapter, I have gone further into how my female informants were constantly juggling between the expectations from family and society in general. I have suggested that women have a different key scenario than men, being the good girl stereotype. My informants, on the other hand, would challenge this key scenario by being bad girls. Further, I described #PinjraTod, a digital movement fighting against the curfew put on female students. I then looked into the performance of the bad girl, where I showed how this act was more appropriate, and sometimes expected, in some situations than others. I also looked into the risks when acting as bad girls. This chapter was also meant to give background into one of the taboos the media start-ups wanted to break. In the next chapter, I will go further into the media start-ups SpeakUp and WeMedia, and the entrepreneurs behind them.
Chapter 3: Taking Back the Media

When there had been a clash between the student parliament and some students demonstrating at Ashita’s old university, she called to tell me the news. I knew from before that Ashita and her college friends were not supporting the student parliament. Ashita had told me that they were a bit scared of them. When I went with Ashita to look around her old campus a couple of weeks before, she had lowered her voice when we walked passed the student parliament office, telling me that they were far right wing and regressive in their values. She also told me that they had beaten up people who demonstrated against the government party BJP. She kept her voice low and the conversation short, before changing the subject she said: “It’s not so good, if they hear me say this, they will probably beat me up.” This day, there had been a demonstration because the student parliament had interfered with an event where a controversial spokesperson from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was going to hold a speech. JNU was often referred to as a left-wing university by my informants. When the event was eventually cancelled, a group of students demonstrated on campus. According to Ashita, the right-wing student parliament had then stormed the demonstration. Although the police had gone to the scene to calm the situation down, Ashita stressed that they had just dragged people out. One of her friends had been hurt during the riot. After Ashita told me about what had happened, I asked her if I could read about it on any of the Indian newspapers’ websites. She said “no, they will probably not write about it”. The following day, Ashita and I went to a market to do some shopping. She was still upset about the previous day’s event. Since she had told me that the media would not have written about it, I asked her where she got news about the clash. She then told me that she used the hashtag on Facebook and took up her phone and said: “I don’t know if it’s still trending, oh, it’s trending”. Since I had never used hashtags on Facebook to read news, she had to show me how it worked. Apparently, Facebook shows the hashtags that have been shared the most in the area where the phone is. When Ashita clicked on the hashtag, all articles, blogposts, pictures, etc. that had been shared with the same hashtag came up on her phone. We then saw that some of the articles were shared from Indian newspapers’ websites. I asked her why she would not go directly onto their page.
She said “mainstream news are biased” and explained that she would rather read alternative media.

The example above shows how news consumption has changed with the digital revolution, going from reading the analogue newspapers, to being able to pick from countless options in the digital sphere where alternative digital media actors have flourished. When following the start-up ecosystem, my main focus was on start-ups within the media industry, who can count for such alternative voices on the internet. They are digital platforms with their own editorial team. The aim of this chapter is to describe how these young new media organisations challenges the traditional media and try to make an impact by writing about issues they feel are tabooed by society, taboos such as the good girl and the bad girl I discussed in the previous chapter. I will start by sharing my informants perception of traditional media, which can explain why these media start-ups are so popular. I will then present two of the new media platforms, SpeakUp and WeMedia, and the entrepreneurs behind them. While the entrepreneurs both wanted change in society, they had different strategies. I will then discuss their business strategies, their impact, and finally why my informants wanted to work in media start-ups, rather than traditional media.

**Mainstream news is biased**

As shown in the example starting this chapter, Ashita told me that she would not read news on mainstream media because she claimed they were biased. When talking to my informants about news in India, there was a common occurrence that they referred to the mainstream media houses as biased. Either bought off by politicians, or other wealthy people. When I asked Naveena and her friends about it once, they all said “yes!” at the same time, followed by a story. The story was about the son of a wealthy family in India, who was involved in a car accident. After the accident, it was all over the news, but then, after what the storyteller said was 30 minuets, there was no trace of the accident anywhere in the medial. While the media entrepreneurs never confirmed if there was some truth in this or not, this perception can explain why these media platforms have the outreach that they have, people like Ashita, who will rather read alternative media than mainstream news.
SpeakUp

Opening up SpeakUp on your computer, the first thing you see is “Welcome to SpeakUp where young India speaks up on issues that matter. Start writing now and join the 50K+ strong community of active citizens” followed by a button you can press to write a story. The headlines that follow are about themes such as women, patriarchy, the conflict in Kashmir, poverty and caste. SpeakUp was the first media start-up I heard of, and it took me two months of networking to finally get in touch with the founder Tarun and schedule a meeting. I then went out to his office in Noida, where his team of around 25 people work, all of them in their twenties. Noida is an area outside of Delhi, a place where, according to my informants, a number of media organisations have their offices. SpeakUp had a small, open office space with a separate meeting room. After our first interview, I was invited to use their office to write my field notes and meet the rest of the team.

Combining spheres: Breaking the culture of silence

One of our key missions is to kind of break the culture of silence that exist in India. There is silence around a lot of issues here. There are issues that are tabooed by the society which shouldn’t be. That is something we have a clear focus on. We want to break these taboos and we want to get the young people to do this themselves (...) broadly, the mission is to kind of impact the young generation and move them out of this culture of silence that exists out there.

This is what Tarun told me when I asked him what kind of impact he wants to achieve with SpeakUp. Tarun explains that young people are often told to not question stereotypes and norms in society, as such they grow up in a culture of silence. One such stereotype is the good girl, described in the previous chapter. Tarun wants his platform to take up these stereotypes and write about the issues that are tabooed by society. The taboos he is referring to are around sex and sexuality, patriarchal gender roles, caste discrimination and racism. He gives me an example of a campaign they have been running for the past two years around women’s menstruation, where they encourage people to write about it on their platform. Before meeting Tarun, I was told about this
taboo by my female informants. A woman should not talk about her menstruation and when she is menstruating, she is not allowed to go into the temple.

Tarun tells me that he started his platform in 2008, before social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter had reached popularity they have today in India. He was in high school at the time, and he saw the news industry as a top down hierarchy, where a few editors decided what should be considered news. In his view, there was a lack of citizen voices, especially young voices, being portrayed in the media. He then started SpeakUp as a blog where he wrote about issues he saw as important, hoping to set them on the agenda. After five months, as he explained, he realised that the problems were too big for him to make a difference on his own and decided that he could make more impact if he created a platform where more people could contribute. Making an impact, meaning to break down taboos and push young people out of the *culture of silence*.

Since then, Tarun tells me that more than seventy five people has sent in their stories to SpeakUp. I ask him why he thinks all of those people want to tell their story:

> You know actually, they have always wanted to, because everybody has these experiences, the thing is somewhere down the line you reach a point where you know something is wrong and it's like a make or break kind of a point. Where you see somebody coming from another religion, and you genuinely don’t have a problem with them, but then you are constantly told that you should. And for a moment, you kind of question that. You know, why should I have a problem with them? And the fact is that, there are enough young people who have had these experiences that can shape the future for the rest of the young people in the country. So there is a need for them to speak up, so you know we can break these norms. (Tarun)

Important in Fredrik Barth’s studies of entrepreneurships is the idea of different spheres of exchange in society. In his study from Darfur (1967), he describes a society consisting of two separate and distant spheres of exchange. One for exchanging certain goods for cash, and another for exchanging millet, beer and labour. The entrepreneur in his study saw an opportunity for combining these spheres to create an enterprise selling tomatoes, where he could return a financial gain (Barth 1967). Drawing on Barth’s analysis, one can argue that in Tarun’s case, he combined the different spheres
of the digital technology and the media, where he sought a possibility to create a platform where young people could raise the issues they faced. One of the differences from Barth’s analysis of the tomato entrepreneur is that Tarun did not start SpeakUp to gain a financial profit. He was in high school and wanted to write about issues he experienced that no one was talking about.

Community guidelines
As mentioned earlier, SpeakUp have community guidelines regarding the stories they publish. While anyone can log into the site and publish directly, Tarun explains that the story will be a private link until it is checked and approved editorially. What they check is that the story is socially relevant and progressive, which are their community guidelines. When I asked Tarun what he meant by socially relevant he explained “you won’t find the typical gossip, or Bollywood, unless it is a film review from a critical point of view. For example, a feminist take down on a patriarchal movie”. Progressive means that the story is not casteist, racist or sexist. As mentioned in the previous chapter, upholding these hierarchies was defined as regressive by both Tarun and my other informants. If a regressive story is posted, they will inform the writers why their story is not appropriate to publish on SpeakUp. By doing so, Tarun explains that they hope the writer will understand why their opinions are wrong, according to SpeakUp’s guidelines.

In the previous chapter, I described how Tarun claimed that people with regressive parents would also grow up to be regressive.

Breaking the key scenario
As shown in the previous chapters, an important theme during my fieldwork was expectation from parents and society. When talking about these expectations with Tarun, he used a metaphor to explain “a box of expectations surrounding young people’s freedom”. In the first chapter, I considered how the key scenario of becoming an entrepreneur challenges parents’ expectations to pursue a safe career, which I have argued is their key scenario to success. However, Tarun stressed that the reason he could pursue his entrepreneurial dream was because his parents do not uphold these
expectations. “My family is very progressive,” he said. As discussed in the previous chapter, if a person comes from a progressive family, he/she would be perceived as progressive and the other way around. Progressive being that they let their children choose their own career, get married through a love marriage, and that they could get married whenever they wanted. In Tarun's family, both he and his brother had pursued the entrepreneur dream, and he told me about his sister who is thirty-four years old and not married. “That is very unusual for an Indian family,” he said. These expectations were also written about on the platform, and expressed as one of the taboos they wanted to break. After I left the field, I saw that SpeakUp started a new campaign where they wanted to break down the good girl and good boy stereotype. The good girl qualities that were written about on the platform, were the same as my informant had told me during my fieldwork. While I never heard the term good boy during my fieldwork, one of the qualities that was listed in the stories on SpeakUp was that he should pick a safe and risk-free career. As such, one can argue that this campaign wanted to break what I have identified as the parents’ key scenarios.

**WeMedia**

While Tarun started SpeakUp to make a platform where young people can break taboos in society, WeMedia started as an experiment. The six, now co-founders, created an article about which Bollywood actor or actress would play the different characters in the popular American TV show *Game of Thrones*. They were all followers of content sites such as BuzzFeed and Vice, and they wanted to see if they could do the same. They posted the story on Facebook and it went viral, it was shared and re-shared by others and after three days it had two million views. They kept posting stories anonymously, and when their boss figured out, he encouraged them to do it full time. Their old boss was also their first investor. Today they reach out to 20 million people per month according to their own site. In addition to WeMedia they have expanded with to additional platforms, one for women’s issues, and one in Hindi.

**Young writing for the young**
Walking into the farmhouse\(^2\) property in South Delhi where WeMedia have their office, the first thing I see are a group of four-five people in their early twenties sitting around the outdoor table smoking. I go inside to the colourful reception where I’m met by Aarish, one of six co-founders of the Buzzfeed-inspired media start-up. He takes me to one of the conference rooms where we sit down for our interview. On our way there we walk through an open office space where some of the 200 people working there are sitting. Everyone I can see looks like they’re in their twenties. Having young writers is also a part of WeMedia’s philosophies, Aarish tells me: “We hire millennials to write for millennials (... we follow this hot philosophy that only X can write for X (...) I can’t expect a 20-year-old girl to write for a 40-year-old woman”.

Aarish tells me that the audience they want to reach out to are between sixteen and twenty-five years old, and in accordance with their strategy, it is important for them to have a young team of writers. The average age group in their office is between twenty-three to twenty-five. Although they have a young team, Aarish tells me the importance of diversity in their news room. They therefore hire people from different backgrounds, people from different cities and different sections of society. This is, according to Aarish, different in print media’s digital websites, which are mostly led by the same people who have been doing print and TV. “It is very difficult for them to reorient themselves to behave like young new media companies,” he says. However, he mentions that this is changing and that these newspapers have hired more young people after looking at the new, young digital media organisations. For example, two of my informants who worked for a media start-up started to work for the Times of India’s digital team a couple of weeks before I left the field.

The philosophy behind WeMedia can indicate that Aarish and his co-founders had the same feeling as Tarun, that the traditional news media, do not reflect young people. As he says “only X can write for X”, which is why they just hire young people. Something he claims is different in traditional media. Also, by hiring young people to write for young people, it could seem that he is also saying that WeMedia is not for the older generation. It is a platform for young people in India.

\(^2\) Farmhouse is a term used in Delhi for a house built on a plantation. The farmhouses are usually luxurious with a huge outdoor area.
News is subjective

“For a 16 year old girl or for a Game of Thrones fan, a death in a GOT episode can be the biggest news for her (...) For a 25 year old it could be politics and for a 30 year old it could be tech.” (Aarish)

Aarish is telling me the other philosophy behind WeMedia, which is that news is subjective. Because of this philosophy, they don’t want to prioritize the content they publish, as opposed to print media. By ‘prioritise content’, he means that they don’t want to give some stories more space or attention than others. Going into WeMedia’s webpage their stories are organised in two columns. One of the columns is dedicated to the latest stories they have published, and it’s organised in what looks like chronological order. The other column is for the top stories, the stories which have got most readers or shares on social media. Aarish tells me their structure is inspired by social media: “On social media you will have a Hollywood trailer, followed by foreign policy update, followed by the London attacks, followed by a video of a cat stuck in a tree. And the engagement is equal across all these content pieces.” It could seem as if they are inspired by the new way of reading news, as shown in the example when Ashita read her news about the riot at her university.

Making a change: Different strategy

When I visited WeMedia’s website for the first time, I didn’t get the impression that they had the same mission to break taboos as Tarun. However, after following them online for a longer period, I noticed that some of the stories regarded the same taboos as Tarun talked about. For example, I saw stories about women’s sexuality, both on WeMedia and their platform for women, and there were stories about gender roles, rape and LGBT rights. When I then met Aarish I asked him if the young new media companies represented a new way of thinking and doing things. He said:

Yeah, for example, we were the first one to champion LGBT rights in India, we were the first one to talk about marital rape, the first one to talk about child molestation. Or gay marriages for example (...) We started with those topics, we started talking about things that no one else will. And not
Homosexuality is criminalized by law in India. SpeakUp has also created a platform dedicated to LGBT rights, which is run by a separate editorial team who is from the community. I then asked if one of the goals was to make change. He said:

*Of course, that is always the thought, right (...) change that really matters, you have to reach people in scale. And to reach people in scale you have to do things that don’t really fall under journalism or don’t really fall under serious content for example, and that people would argue does nothing for the society except entertains them. But that critique is of the content that brings in enough users, brings in enough revenue for us to do 20% of the content that we really want to do (...) we’ve always been very understanding of the fact that, if we don’t operate at scale, neither will this be a good business, neither will we be able to make any change.*

While the mission behind WeMedia is not to make change, it is to make a good business, they also want to have an impact as does Tarun, an impact on what was defined as regressive. However, WeMedia have a different strategy where the business comes first, if they have a good business, they can also share the 20% of the progressive stories they do.

**Economy of fame**

One of the differences between SpeakUp and WeMedia is how they keep their business going with money. As mentioned, Aarish stressed that it was important for them to make a ‘good business’. To make a good business was never brought up during my conversations with Tarun, rather that he needed to make monetary profit in order to pay his employees and keep the start-up running. As mentioned, WeMedia had received investments from Aarish’s old boss when they first started. Over time, more venture capitalists and angels have invested in their company, additionally they have advertisers on their platform that bring in revenue. On SpeakUp, on the other hand, there are no advertisers. In the first chapter, I described how Tarun began his start-up journey by going to 200-300 meetings with investors who all gave him a “no”, he then
won a competition that gave him a grant, which kept the start-up going for a year. This competition was held by the UN. After this, SpeakUp has collaborated with NGOs where they run campaigns together with them on their platform. This is one way they keep the business going. Additionally, they have taken on investments from another new media organisation. Although both of these new media organisations are able to get going with their business and, as Aarish emphasised, they keep a good business, when talking to Kavita, she said something interesting. Kavita is in her early twenties and had started a new media platform two years ago. Like Tarun, she started as a blogger, and the blog evolved into an organisation with its own editorial team. She emphasised that making money on a media start-up was difficult. Her strategy was to encourage her readers to give donations, which they did. These donations were what she used to keep her business running. On Kavita’s platform there were also stories about the same issues as on SpeakUp and WeMedia. Stories around sex and sexuality, gender roles, caste and religious divide. What she said about profit during our talk that was interesting in this regard was:

*Today it’s not about how much salary you are making or anything, but more about how much value are you adding to society. And most of the people today, they are very much attracted by fame. You know, most of my generation, so you know working in a media company gives you that fame. Because you’re out in the public, you’re interviewing people, people are praising you for your work and you become a public celebrity in that way. And you know people will prefer having one million followers than having one million salary today. We like influence over money today.* (Kavita)

Here she brings forward two other motivations than monetary; fame and impact. While fame was never mentioned during my conversations with Aarish or Tarun, they were both famous, at least among the other people I talked to. Meaning that everyone I talked to knew who they were and read on their platforms. When it comes to impact, this was a motivation both of them shared. They both wanted to make an impact in India by writing about taboos and make people more progressive.

In the first chapter, I looked at the importance of what Bourdieu defines as social capital within the start-up network. While Bourdieu (1986:86) defines social capital as long-
lasting relationships and membership within a group, I will argue that followers can be understood as a type of digital social capital. Followers is a term used about the people who follow you on social media. Here Kavita is also referring to the followers they have on their digital platforms. While these relationships are usually not face to face, they can be long term in the sense that they follow the platforms and the entrepreneurs on social media over a longer period. According to Field (2003:14) the relationships in the form of social capital are valued because they can help a person achieve something that would be difficult or not possible without them. When discussing social capital within the start-up ecosystem, these relationships could give them access to closed pitching sessions. In this regard, I will suggest that the digital social capital is important because the entrepreneurs need the followers to have an impact. As Aarish claims, to make change one has to reach people in scale. In other words, one needs a sufficient amount of digital social capital. Additionally, this digital social capital can also be converted into economic capital, as with Aarish and WeMedia. Meaning that they receive more advertising money by having more followers.

A new agenda setting

When I wrote my post on the Facebook group mentioned in the methodology, a young woman named Divia contacted me. She was a journalist and worked for a start-up, X. We met for a coffee a week after. As with my other female informants, Divia was also a bad girl, and the expectations surrounding the good girl and shaming of the bad girl came up early in our conversation. Divia explained that the clothes she was wearing, a dress that showed off her shoulders and legs, would be considered bad girl and a lot of people would shame her for dressing like that. However, she stressed that dressing as a bad girl was important for her to show others that she is an empowered women. She further explained that this had not always been the case. She had grown up in a small village in North India, where a lot of people were regressive. She tells me that in her teens she had a lot of guy friends and smoked cigarettes, and people would bully and shame her for her bad girl behaviour: “In fact, sometimes the bullying would just get so much that I didn’t know how to deal with it.” She then explains that this changed when she started to read on the Internet:
I would always blame myself, that I couldn’t be the good girl, but then when I started reading about accounts from different girls and how they also have been shamed, I started taking more charge of my decisions. And right now, I’m like fine, this is my life. And I have grown up to be a very strongly-opinionated feminist. And that’s only, I believe, thanks to the online reading I’ve been doing.

The online reading she is referring to is on the different new media platforms, one she mentions is Tarun’s SpeakUp. She then explains that the reason she wanted to become a journalist was so she could give other women the same experience she had when reading on the Internet.

When Aarish told me about the stories they publish with issues that he claimed no one else wrote about, he gave me an example of the impact they had by telling me about his mother, who had changed some of her values by reading on his platform:

Now, the more and more my mom reads about these things, a lot of her perceptions are also changing. So now I can go home and openly talk about LGBT rights, or gay marriages, different caste marriages and stuff like that.

Within the field of journalism and media studies the terms gatekeeping and agenda setting have been used to describe the media’s selection of the news they present (Dearing & Rogers 1996, Shoemaker & Vos 2009, Srivastava & Roy 2016). Gatekeeping is used to describe the power to select what stories to exclude and remove in the news content. Agenda setting, on the other hand, is the importance the media gives to certain news that has already been selected. This kind of agenda setting can be done by giving some stories more time than others on TV, or where the story is put, and how much space is given to it in the newspaper (Srivastava & Roy 2016:33-34). Further, this media agenda “...may influence the public agenda” (Srivastava & Roy 2016: 34). According to Srivastava and Roy (2016) traditionally, mass media has had a monopoly when it comes to gatekeeping and agenda setting. In their article, they discuss how the new media has challenged this monopoly in India. They give an example of how Twitter was used in the aftermath of the gang rape of Jyoti Singh in 2012. As discussed earlier, the media entrepreneurs stressed that the issues they write about have not been present in traditional media. Based on their perception, one can argue that these issues did not
make it through the gatekeeping and agenda-setting processes by the mainstream media. However, these young media entrepreneurs use their platforms to take them up, as such they try to set a new agenda. An agenda where the values they perceive as regressive are brought up and discussed. Looking at the examples of Divia and Aarish’s mother, one can argue that in these cases they did have an influence. In the sense that Divia became more proud of her bad girl act, and Aarish’s mother changed her values.

Above, I argued that the followers these entrepreneurs and their platforms have can be seen as digital social capital. I will here suggest that this capital can be converted into symbolic power. In the previous chapter, I discussed how parents have symbolic capital and power within the family based on their rank. In this regard, I will suggest that the status and rank the entrepreneurs and their platform’s receive through their digital social capital give them symbolic capital and power to make an impact and change the agenda. However, the young media start-ups I encountered during my fieldwork, are not the only actors who use the digital platform to try and change the agenda and have an impact. There are also other voices that come forward on the Internet, for example those of the Hindu nationalists, who were promoting the values my informants regarded as regressive, which I will go further into in the next chapter. Also, it is important to note that the young media organisations also have gatekeeping and agenda-setting processes, for example with SpeakUp and their guidelines.

**Working in a media start-up**

I used to work for a traditional media company earlier, and it was a bureaucratic mess. I was only reporting to my manager, who didn’t give a shit, and would never consider my ideas. And they had this strict editorial line and would never listen to the juniors in contrast to new media. First of all, it has taught me so many skills. I did not know video, I have learned all that working for a start-up. Second, my ideas are listened to, top up, my editor-in-chief sits with me and I can freely debate him. Debate, argue, discuss with him, and my ideas are encouraged. That is an attitude most new media organisations have. They are very democratic and it’s beautiful.

(Divia)
During my fieldwork I wondered why most of my informants would work in start-ups instead of traditional media. As I was told, working in a start-up gives less salary than in a traditional media organisation. The quote above is from my conversation with Divia, I had just asked her why she wanted to work in a start-up. Here she explains that she has learned more working there, and that she feels she is a part of the decision-making in the organisation, in contrast to her experience in traditional media. In the introduction, I introduced Dhruv, a journalist I met at the same party as Ishan from the prologue. Dhruv is a young, newly-educated journalist working for a traditional media organisation. When I met Dhruv, he was in the beginning phase of starting his own media start-up with three friends from college. When talking to Dhruv, he shared that he was frustrated because his stories were always stopped at his senior desk, and that his ideas were not listened to. This, as he told me, was the reason he wanted to start his own start-up. He wanted to be able to write the stories he saw as important.

What comes to the forefront in my conversations with Divia and Dhruv is that Divia feels she has more freedom in the start-up, and Dhruv feels that his freedom is restricted. By using the words *juniors* and *seniors* it could seem as if one of the differences in traditional versus new media, is age hierarchy and that this hierarchy is restricting their freedom. Here that Dhruv’s stories would be stopped at his senior desk, and Divia who could not be listened to, because of her junior position. As mentioned earlier, the new media start-ups I have presented in this chapter, both had young organisations. This was similar in other media start-ups I visited. While I never got the chance to come to Divia’s workplace, she told me that the average age group in her office was also around twenty-five. While there surely are other hierarchies and power relations within the new media organisations, it would seem as if this age hierarchy was less present there, which can be one of the reasons why the young journalists wanted to work in the new media organisations. While there surely are other hierarchies within the new media organisations, it would seem as if this age hierarchy is not present.

Another reason Divia wanted to work in the start-up, was, as she claimed, she could write about what she wanted to. She told me about her friend who recently had written a controversial story:
Mostly we are encouraged to write whatever we want to write about. We’ve written about some very bold topics, my friend who’s happen to write about the female orgasm and that’s really really taboo and she wrote about that.

This shows that the media start-ups she worked for, also were attempting to break taboos. As mentioned, there is a taboo around female sexuality.

Summary

In this chapter I have gone further into two media start-ups and the entrepreneurs behind them. I have argued that they both wanted to make a change and have an impact by writing about taboos, however, they had different strategies. I have looked into their business strategy, and suggest that one of their motivations was to get digital social capital, followers, and how this digital social capital gave them a position and rank where they have symbolic capital and power. Lastly, I have looked into one of the differences between working in new media organisations and traditional media. Based on my informants’ descriptions, I have argued that the age hierarchy is less present in new media organisations, which was one of the reasons why they wanted to work there.
Chapter 4: Language and the Internet

At the end of the day new media can only have limited impact because Internet access plays a big role in India. Even though it's a massive population that access the Internet, it's not enough. There are 200-300 million people on the Internet in India, but there is a population of 1.2 billion. So you can’t possibly think of having the same impact. (Tarun)

In Barth's (1963) analytical model of entrepreneurship he suggest that one should look at “factors restricting the course of an enterprise once it has launched” (1963:9). In the quote above, Tarun mentioned one such restriction, Internet access. When talking to Neha and her friends, they told me that the young new media organisations could not have enough impact to make a change, because the people who read them were a specific part of the population, the young urban middle class who were already progressive. In this chapter I will look further into the restrictions for the new media platforms’ impact and outreach. I will start by discussing language and argue that knowing English can be understood as cultural capital that is accessible mostly to the upper and middle classes in India, and how people who do not have this cultural capital are perceived as more regressive. I will then go further into Tarun and Aarish’s strategies to overcome this language barrier. Furthermore, I will discuss the Internet. While the Internet gave my informants affordance, in the sense that it gave them a place where they could discuss and break taboos, there are also other voices on the Internet. The voices of the Hindu nationalists who have a different agenda than both Tarun and Aarish. I will also discuss briefly around censorship and freedom of speech.

Hinglish

Moving around the streets of New Delhi it is difficult not to notice the many languages people speak with each other spoken. You mostly hear Hindi and English, often people switch between the two, Hinglish, in addition to countless local Indian languages spoken by the many people who migrated to the city for different reasons. That people were switching between Hindi and English was something I didn’t pay that much attention to at first. It seemed to come natural to them, and I also thought they spoke English around
me out of respect, since they knew I wouldn’t understand them otherwise. However, the more time I spent with people the more I started to notice where and when they switched to Hindi and when they didn’t.

Naveena spoke mostly English with her friends, although they sometimes switched to Hindi when they were impersonating someone, for example a family member, or when they used sayings that are used in Hindi. There were also some jokes I was told didn’t work in English. She told me that her parents spoke Hindi to her when she was growing up, but she was expected to answer back in English. When I moved around the city with Naveena I also noticed that she switched to Hindi when we went to the market to buy groceries, when she talked to auto or Uber drivers and bought street food. When we went to restaurants or to the mall, she spoke mostly English. When I asked her about it, she told me it was because they most likely wouldn’t understand English, and she wanted to be understood. Growing up in Delhi she had learned who would understand English, and who wouldn’t. Switching between the two languages due to where she is and who she is talking to, comes natural to her. In the same way that she knows where and when she has to dress and act as a good girl, and when she does not.

**Language and class**

During a conversation about class, Naveena and her friends told me that “English is a class thing”. They explained how people in the upper and middle classes mostly speak English, but it depends on where you went to school and how much you’re exposed to it. For example, people who have travelled or watch more English television tend to speak more English. They went on to discuss whether you need English to succeed in business in India, since there are some people in the business class who don’t speak English. This, as they explained, is because they have their business in India. They ended the conversation by stating that a person does not need to understand or speak good English to get rich in India, however, you need it to be considered *classy*. Referring to a type of behaviour and consumption among the upper and middle classes.

That you need good English to be considered classy implies that knowledge in English is what Bourdieu calls cultural capital. I have mentioned both social – and symbolic capital
in the previous chapters. Cultural capital “may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” (Bourdieu 1986:82), as such cultural capital can be understood as forms of knowledge, skills, taste and other qualifications a person attributes through educational exposure (Thompson 1991:14). This educational exposure includes the knowledge a person gets through schooling and formal education, and upbringing. Cultural capital is thereby shaped by school tuition and family circumstances (Field 2003:14). Both cultural, social and economic capital play a part in constructing classes in a hierarchal order in society.

According to Lavanya Murali Proctor (2015) “English language ability is ideologically positioned as relating to upper middle or upper class identity and as leading to social mobility and empowerment” (2015:296) in India. She traces its high symbolic value to the colonial times, which has been “reinforced by globalization-related language ideologies” (2015:296) which commodifies the English language (2015:295). These ideologies involve the belief that knowledge in English will make a person successful in a globalised market, where English is on top of the hierarchy of global languages (2015:300). In her article about English and globalisation, Proctor (2015) looks more into how mastering the English language is acquired through schooling. She here focuses on people who are not themselves fluent in English, “but desire it for themselves or their children” (2015:295) With an attempt to unify the linguistic differentiation in the country, the Indian government introduced the ‘three-language formula’ (TLF), an educational requirement giving Indian schoolchildren the right to study three languages (LaDousa 2014:68): English, “their mother tongue or regional standard” (Chand 2011:11) and Hindi. In line with the TLF, schoolchildren in India have, in principle, access to this cultural capital manifested in English skills through their formal education. However, both Proctor (2015) and Chand (2011) claim that this is not the case in practice. Chand (2011) argues that “this rule is frequently ignored” (2011:12). Proctor (2015), on the other hand, shows that the teachers at the schools where she did her fieldwork, didn’t ignore the rule, yet gave the students poor English education. As such, Proctor (2015) pinpoints this “lack of access to good English education and instruction” (2015:302) as the principal barrier to require proper knowledge in English. This lack of access is in turn caused by “lack of time, money and good teachers” (2015:302). She thereby argues that the people who actually do get
access to English skills, is the upper stratum who can afford high quality education in elite institutions, who can afford tutoring outside of school, or people like Naveena who gets much of her English knowledge at home (Proctor 2015). English language knowledge is therefore a kind of cultural capital which is not accessible to everyone through institutional education. In this regard there is a connection between economic capital and the access to the cultural capital; English knowledge, and as Naveena and her friends puts it, it is a factor in deciding who is considered classy and who is not.

The Language problem for the media entrepreneurs

Language barriers were a problem that came up during most of my interviews with the media entrepreneurs. Following from the above discussion that knowledge in English is a kind of cultural capital, by publishing in English, these start-ups will only reach out to the more privileged people in the upper and middle classes. During my conversation with Tarun he tells me that he launched in Hindi the same year. Meaning that he hired a Hindi team, and opened up for stories written in Hindi. He tells me that this was important to have more impact. As mentioned in the previous chapter, his mission is to break what he calls the culture of silence by giving young people a platform where they can share their issues. When the platform was in English, people without knowledge in English were not able to publish their own stories, or read the stories published by others. Tarun tells me that this launch was very successful, and he has therefore planned to launch in other Indian languages as well.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the WeMedia media start-up consists of three separate publications. In addition to WeMedia where they publish entertainment and news, they have one publication for women and one in Hindi. When I asked Aarish why they have a separate platform in Hindi, he said it was largely a part of their business plan and important in reaching out to more people and as such, getting more advertisers. However, there was a particular reason why they chose to have a separate platform, instead of translating the content on WeMedia into English. He explained:

*We always had the choice of doing [WeMedia] in Hindi (...) but we created a separate brand, because (...) If you take the US as an example, the
language is the same across the whole country. Pop culture references are also the same. So US has a model where one website can serve the whole country. In India it is very different. You drive one hour in the opposite direction of Delhi, the pop culture references change completely. They have never heard about Game of Thrones, they don’t know who Justin Bieber is...They are also more conservative, more orthodox. Some of the LGBT-rights... It will be difficult, to sort of, speak to them about that.

Aarish continued and explained that the Hindi publication is progressive, in the sense that they publish stories which focus on issues surrounding caste and gender roles. However, he claims they have to be more careful there than in their English publications. He gives me an example:

So the Hindi publication is also very liberal, but just to give you a sense of the kind of content, what will work on WeMedia [English publication] and what will not work on [Hindi publication]. Are you familiar with who Salman Khan is? So Salman Khan is a Bollywood superstar; his new film just came out, “Tube Light”. So he’s been involved with a couple of police cases. So one of the most famous or infamous case that he was involved in was... I think allegedly he was drinking, he was drinking and driving and he ran over four guys who were sleeping on a footpath, right. I think he got acquitted in that case right, but on WeMedia [English publication] I can call him a killer, or (...) I can make fun of him, or I can criticise him. But you do that in Hindi and you’re dead, because Salman Khan is a God to them (...) You have to be a bit more careful (...) So just the tonality in subjects that you talk about has to be slightly different when you sort of go towards different languages. Say... You can’t... You can’t criticise the prime minister of this country too much on Hindi, but you can do that on WeMedia [English publication].

In claiming that people with limited English competence have more traditional values, Aarish connects the cultural capital of English to the more progressive part of the population. And he sees the people without access to English as more regressive, in the
sense that they are more conservative. As such, their strategy is built on the belief that they should be more careful when writing in Hindi out of fear of losing their Hindi readers. It can also be argued that they are afraid of being labelled as anti-government, as Divia told me was usual when writing something critical of the prime-minister. By doing this, he also makes a strong differentiation between himself and his Hindi readers. He being the liberal, progressive one and them being regressive in the sense that they uphold the traditional values labelled as regressive.

Sociologist Vineeta Chand (2011) makes an argument similar to Proctor’s (2015). She argues that schooling in English is more expensive, and that within a “lower class north-Indian setting, vernacular and Hindi-medium schooling are the traditional norm” (LaDousa 2005; Ramanathan 2005 in Chand 2011:20) She also argues that the lower classes and rural upper-middle classes who don’t speak English have a tendency to endorse the ideologies promoted by the Hindu nationalism movement often referred to as Hindutva (Chand 2011:28). As I explained earlier in this chapter, Naveena shifted her language according to the places she was and the people she spoke to. These places were usually also the same places that were referred to as the more regressive places. Regressive places being where a woman should act the good girl. It was a common occurrence that my informants would tell me that people were more regressive because they lacked education. Also, the regressive places were usually the places associated with more poverty. Something which can indicate that the distinction between regressive and progressive is also a distinction between the upper and middle classes, and the lower classes in the society.

**Other Voices on the Internet**

Another problem that is linked to class, is access to the Internet. As Tarun states in the quote starting this chapter, a lot of people in India do not have this access, which Tarun believes restricts the impact he and other new media organisations can have. However, there was also another problem with the Internet that came up during my conversations with both the media entrepreneurs and other informants. This problem was that the Internet was open to anyone. When talking with my informant Radhika, whom I introduced in the second chapter, she said:
The tool (Internet and social media) is there for everyone, right. If I have access and you have access, somebody who’s a bit notorious also has access. So fake news is something that is also perpetuated by the digital media, by the alt right. And they have these for fledged publications. So they are also being used as a tool for mass brainwashing, for misleading, for a lot of status propaganda. So that is also happening alongside

(Radhika)

In the quote, Radhika is stressing her fear of the alt right, the Hindu nationalists. She tells me that new media organisations with a Hindu nationalist agenda have flourished, where they publish articles that are sexist, casteist and racist. Articles she labels as fake news, meaning that they are factually wrong, brainwashing and propaganda. When talking to Divia about this, she told me of her fear of a polarised society and gave me an example, that of her father and his friends:

It’s just so sad, so I see my dad and his friends, they share these links on these obscure websites that have such hateful news (...) Like we’re Hindus so there will be hateful news against Muslims, and for them vice versa. And these websites have no credentials, but the ordinary public doesn’t know.

One of the taboos Tarun wanted to break was the religious divide between Hindus and Muslims promoted by the Hindu nationalist movement. In the previous chapter I discussed how the media entrepreneurs have digital social capital and symbolic power, with the examples of Divia and Aarish’s mother. Divia explained that she was encouraged to be more of a bad girl by reading texts on the young new media organisations, and Aarish stressed that his mother had changed her values by reading texts on his and other, similar platforms. From what Divia says about her father and his friends, one can argue that the other voices on the Internet challenge this symbolic power. These other new media platforms that Radhika and Divia read also have followers and can set the agenda. As such, they have digital social capital which could be converted into symbolic capital and power.

Algorithms
As shown in the previous chapter, when Ashita read her news through Facebook, the algorithms behind the hashtag collected all articles about the subject she wanted to read
about in one place. There are also marketing algorithms on Facebook and other types of social media that will decide what suggestions a person gets on his or her home page. During my conversation with Divia, she brought up these algorithms:

On Facebook, you will only see what your friends share. So look at the case in the US. If you are pro-Trump, most of your friends might be too and will share information that supports him. And if you are against him, you share those stories. It creates this echo chamber. And that is my fear of what is happening in India as well. You know, we tend to discuss among our elite friends, and we don’t really talk about what other people are feeling.

(Divia)

The term “digital echo chamber” has been used by commentators and popular media with regards to the US election in 2016. It has been used in the same way that Divia uses it here, in that by reading news on social media, the algorithms will show you contents and news that support rather than challenge or question your beliefs and values, and in that way a polarised society is created (Emba 2016, Hooton 2016). The “echo chamber” Divia was afraid of in India, was a divide between the people who endorsed the regressive values and the Hindutva movement, and people like herself, who were trying to change those values. While I will not go further into the validity of the term “echo chamber”, it is worth mentioning that this fear was shared by most of my informants as a restriction for making an impact. When this came up in my interview with Tarun he said:

The India that I’m seeing being created right now is extremely polarised. It is dangerous to the point where I feel it’s going to be really difficult for us to return to normalcy so to speak. (Tarun)

Tarun explains further that he is scared that his generation does not have the power or will to create the impact he was hoping for when starting SpeakUp. He explains:

Some days, on my really low and demotivated days, I feel like this generation is done for. Like we can’t do anything now. So maybe we should target the thirteen or twelve-year-olds. They are now going to join Facebook, they are going to be floret by social media, by fake news and this and that. And they are going to kind of form their opinions.
While Tarun stresses his doubt and fear of how India as a country is going to develop, before he has to go back to work he tells me that he still has a lot of hope: “you can’t give up on this generation yet”.

**Freedom of speech**

Another restriction that came up during my fieldwork, was the censorship. In the second chapter, I discussed the movie *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, which was not allowed on cinema after it was first showed. While Tarun and Aarish, did not talk about this during our interview, others did. Even though I have anonymised my informants, I will not share which of my informants who talked to me about this, since it is a sensitive subject. However, I will share the quotes:

> I think that in traditional media what happens is that ehm... you can’t because you are in a way controlled by the current government, so you are.. But credible newspaper will always, you know, write whatever they have to. So that is definitely there. But that said, off the record, there is a slight intimidation or something by the current government you know. (Journalist)

> Freedom of speech is on paper a truth, but it’s not really.. you know it’s not really the case. If you say something you could get jailed, you could get killed. Anything could happen. So yeah, I mean killed obviously in the most extreme cases and that is far in the few. But it’s still like, you have to measure your words. People I know have started becoming extremely careful on social media on what they put up and what they don’t. (Journalist)

Even though this topic did not come up during my interviews with Aarish and Tarun, one can suggest that censorship is also a restriction for them. Whether what these quotes says are true or not, it shows a perception about freedom of speech and censorship, which can make people be careful when sending in stories to SpeakUp or posting on social media. Like the last quote suggests.
Summary

In this chapter I have discussed factors that my informants brought up as restrictive on their impact and enterprise. I started by looking into language, where I argued that knowing English can be understood as cultural capital. By publishing in English the young media entrepreneurs will only reach out to a specific part of the population. I then looked into Tarun’s and Aarish’s strategies to overcome this language barrier. While Tarun opened up for stories in English this year, Aarish and WeMedia had their own platform in Hindi. Aarish stressed that they had to be more careful about what they post on the Hindi platform than on the English platform. I argued that with this strategy Aarish makes a divide between himself and his Hindi readers. He himself being progressive, and his Hindi readers more regressive. By following this strategy he deprives the people he perceives as more regressive of the stories he publishes on WeMedia. I then looked into the other voices on the Internet, and my informants’ fear of these voices. I have also touched upon censorship and freedom of speech.
Concluding remarks

This thesis has sought to offer a glimpse into how young urban Indians challenges expectations and hierarchies in the Indian society. I have described how this is done on a personal level, by becoming an entrepreneur or behaving as bad girls, and on a public level by using the digital space to break down taboos and stereotypes. My aim has been to investigate whether the start-up network and the media start-ups reflect a larger youth rebellion in the Indian society.

In the first chapter, I described the start-up network in Delhi, and discussed what it means to become an entrepreneur in an Indian context. I here suggested that becoming an entrepreneur in India not only is a way to make a good business; it is also a way to rebel against parents' expectations for a safe and risk-free career trajectory. In the second chapter, I looked into the expectations for women, and I described how my female informants would challenge the good girl stereotype by being bad girls. The expectations my female informants challenged were both from their family and the society in general. This chapter also gives background into one of the taboos the media start-ups wanted to break – female sexuality and patriarchal gender roles. The third chapter was about the media start-ups and the entrepreneurs behind them. I started with an example of how Ashita read her news to show how the media landscape has changed in a globalised, digital world. This changing landscape is what has given opportunities for alternative voices, such as SpeakUp and WeMedia to take a part in the public discourse. In this chapter, I looked into how these platforms and the entrepreneurs behind them want to make a change in the society, yet have different strategies. Tarun has created a platform that gives young people in India a space where they can share their stories and break taboos. WeMedia on the other hand is a platform which combines entertainment and news, however, their platform also takes up issues such as female sexuality, gender roles and LGBT rights. Lastly, I have looked into the restrictions for these platforms’ impact. I have here given attention to language barriers as a problem for their outreach, something they themselves knew about and wanted to come around. Further, I looked into the openness of the internet. The digital space has given these media start-ups affordance, however, there are also other actors with a
different agenda who has taken advantage of this possibility, like the Hindu nationalist movement who promote the values my informants wanted to change.

The Hindu nationalist movement was something that lurked in the background my entire fieldwork period, and also in this thesis. The fear of their outreach was something all my informants shared. During my fieldwork, there was an election in Uttar Pradesh, where the government party BJP won with a controversial priest as their candidate. This outcome came as a surprise to most of my informants, and they feared that this would reflect the general election in 2019. Since I left Dehli in June 2017, I have seen that the media start-ups have become active for this upcoming election, trying to affect its outcome. Looking at how they and other similar online platforms engage in political elections is something that can be interesting for further anthropological research. Also, during my fieldwork and in this thesis, my main focus has been on start-ups within the media industry, however, the start-up network is larger than that, and looking into start-ups in other industries with anthropological eyes, would be equally interesting. Since the start-up phenomenon is global, and there are start-up ecosystems in cities around the world, doing a study elsewhere would also be interesting for comparative research. There are, for example flourishing start-up ecosystems in Pakistan, Israel and Chile.

Even though my empirical data is based on a limited amount of people relative to the young Indian population, and my observations are from a specific context, I still believe it is possible to conclude that the start-up network and media start-ups in Delhi do reflect a larger youth rebellion, if not in India, at least in Delhi. However, not everyone shares this youth rebellion, and I will emphasise that it is likely to be most present among the urban middle class. Since the young generation is the largest population in India, it will be interesting to see what these media start-ups can achieve by posting stories and attempting to break taboos. If, as Tarun hopes, they can manage to break the culture of silence.

Since I left the field, I have followed both SpeakUp and WeMedia online. WeMedia is still posting some controversial stories among their entertainment stories, and on the SpeakUp platform I see more and more stories in Hindi. I have an enormous respect for
the people behind these start-ups and I do hope they will achieve the impact they are working for. As mentioned in the last chapter, even though Tarun sometimes wondered if SpeakUp would manage to have the impact he wanted it to have, he still had a lot of hope. I will end this thesis by sharing what he told me before he had to end our interview, and go back to work:

You know, this is a big struggle that millions of young people are putting up with on an everyday basis. And I think, I mean I might have painted a fairly grey picture for you, but there is also a lot of hope. Because when you meet people, like when I meet people who work here every single day, I get a lot of hope. Seeing that this is not my idea anymore, and they are equally dedicated and they are equally passionate about not just breaking taboos on the platforms, but in their personal lives as well. That is the impact that it has. When we meet candidates for job interviews for example, we often meet people who has worked in traditional media houses, and when they come here and they actually let a lot of their frustration out, we realize that you know, people are willing to do something, take drastic steps to make a change, and there are people who are doing it. So I think that is equally commendable and phenomenal to be honest, because that is what’s going to have an impact in the long run.
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