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# Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

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## Abstract Submission Form

**1. Paper / Proposal Title:** Virtual Reality: The Multiplex as Symbolic Capital of Consumerism in the Mofussil Town in India

**2. Format:** Written paper

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**5. University or Company Affiliation:** Department of Film Studies, University of St Andrews

### **6. Abstract (300 words):**

Audience demographics in Indian cinemas today is radically aligning itself to the consumption of the 'Multiplex' film, a transnational product bearing traits of both the incoming traffic of globalisation as well as the outgoing signals of an indigenous self. The technology led multiplexes, relaying digital prints instantaneously from servers across the globe, are positioned as the premier commodity offering a physical cinema going experience best aligned to the digital preferences of an increasingly consumerist world. Multiplexes are intentionally constructed to be marked apart as a symbol of global capital, by the frequent use of ostentatious designs and embodied in the huge steel and glass structures, which dramatically alter the urban landscape in which they are positioned. Both the reality of the international comfort zone offered by the multiplex structure and the virtuality of the digital multiplex film, are patronised by the middle class, who have the high mean disposable incomes to be able to actively invest in this experience. Corresponding to the shift in demographics and consumption patterns of the middle class audience in metropolises, there is a critical movement observable in the preferences of the middle class mofussil resident whose economic situation affords them the aspiration to attain the international living standards which many within the Indian middle class in the premier cities are now enjoying.

A case study of Siliguri in West Bengal, famous for its geographical and cultural position as a regional trade centre, and originating as a mofussil town of the Darjeeling district, traces how the imagining of a self identity of its inhabitants originally shaped by the traditional four 'T's (tea, timber, transport, tourism) is repositioned globally, as it is impacted by the visual re-landscaping and digital manifestations of the multiplex experience. Cinema watching at the multiplexes in Siliguri, along with its associated digital bandwagon of social media reviews, forums, trailers, motion posters and online booking systems assumes the predominant symbolism of conspicuous consumption in new interpretations of Siliguri's latent possibilities as a micro-world trade centre.

### **7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Shorna Pal is a PhD candidate in the Department of Film Studies, University of St Andrews. Her research focuses on Indian cinema in the context of globalisation and economic liberalisation and tracks the development in Hindi and other regional Indian film industries of an approach to film that is artistic in taste but commercial in presentation. Her thesis is entitled "The Monsoon Crush: A critical analysis of the commercialisation of the Indian Art Film under the influence of social and demographic changes stemming from globalisation". Shorna has a Masters in Film Production from the University of Central Lancashire. Shorna has earlier worked within the Indian film and television sector, including serving as Executive Producer for Zee Telefilms Ltd. in Mumbai. She has also worked with brands such as British Airways, Jet Airways, Elecon Engineering Company Ltd., Australian Trade Commission in producing a range of multimedia in marketing and advertising campaigns. Shorna has also made short films that have been screened at film festivals in Hiroshima, Berlin and Warrington.



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