

Gender Neutral: Shah Rukh to pitch for Emami fairness

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SOME modern philosophers have always said the ideal human state is androgynous. The man-woman concept is a language-perpetuated tyranny that only facilitates oppression of women. To achieve the state, the human slate would have to be wiped off clean. Thinkers and theorists would be pleased to know that Bollywood, that crucible of hip and hamstring ideas, is fashioning a script that aims at achieving that state.

Its reigning god (yes, only gods can break the rules) Shah Rukh Khan is going to pitch for a fairness cream. King Khan, as they call him, and Queen Khan as they may call him after he endorses Emami's Fair & Handsome brand. The man has merged into a woman — the ideal state.

Khan is not doing this for the first time. Two years ago, he created a storm in a bathtub by selling Lux. Now, he's all set to create a storm in a tube. SRK's commercial is expected to hit the boob tube in a month. Khan's earlier essay on that ideal state won some value back for the Lux brand. And this time he's giving it another shot, hopefully, aiming for the perfect take.

Experts say Shah Rukh could do for Fair And Handsome what he did for Lux. The ad gathered so much publicity, and generated so much shock and awe, that after the commercial, it not only arrested declining brand fortunes, but also led to a spurt in sales. "The commercial could not have come at a better time for Lux, as it was in its 75th year and badly needed some clutter-breaking activity," a source at JWT, the agency which worked on the account, said. Recognising the potential for men's fairness creams, the Rs 600-crore Emami had forayed into the segment over a year back. Recently, HLL too extended its power brand Fair & Lovely to Fair & Lovely Menz Active targeted exclusively at men.

According to industry estimates, about 30% of fairness cream users in India happen to be men, and that they have been onsets of the

product. The total fairness cream market is estimated at little over Rs 800 crore. Further, a Gillette survey cited by Euromonitor states that urban men in India spend an average of 20 minutes in front of the mirror each morning, while women primp for 18. All this is obviously great opportunity for marketers like Emami & HLL.

As part of his existing Rs 5-crore deal with Emami, Shah Rukh already endorses the company's Navratan oil, talc and Sona Chandi chyawprash. He will continue to endorse these brands along side the fairness cream, the sources added. While Emami's biggest celebrity endorsers continue to be Amitabhi Bachchan and Shah Rukh, the personal care and ayurvedic company has had associations Madhuri Dixit, Raveen Tandon, Sunny Deol, Govinda, Sourav Ganguly and Virendra Schwag in the past.

Emami is in the midst of an expansion spree, and has allocated Rs 220 crore for expanding its FMCG arm, foraying into new categories and acquisitions. The company has appointed Ernst & Young to scout for potential acquisitions.

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King Khan may promote basmati

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IT HAS all the makings of a Brand India mega potboiler: Bollywood meets Basmati. King Khan could be the new brand ambassador and Indian Basmati could sport an instant recall logo, worldwide. A Rs 20-crore ad blitzkrieg for basmati will take off soon in West Asia and Europe. The basmati promotion strategy is being put in motion by the Basmati Development Fund (BDF) and the All India Rice Exporters Association (AIREA). The go-ahead to the campaign was given in end April at the 65th meeting of BDF. Funds are due to be transferred from BDF to AIREA to foot the bill for the ad campaigns by Grey Worldwide and Crayons.

The locus of the promotion strategy would be to promote knowledge about Indian basmati rice through a suitable logo and advertisements. It was also suggested at the meeting that the superiority of the Indian basmati rice can be projected through brand ambassador Shah Rukh Khan.

Grey made a presentation before the BDF in June last year followed by Crayons. It was decided that Grey would design the Basmati campaign for the European market (Germany, France, Italy) while Crayons would run the campaign in West Asia where Pakistan has been offering stiff competition to India. The Grey campaign in Europe (supplementing local cuisine with Basmati) is to take off as early as possible while the W Asia promotion strategy (better quality of Indian Basmati compared to the rest) is slated for July-August.

But the decision to transfer two-thirds of the current BDF corpus of Rs 30 crore to AIREA for the ad campaigns, leaving only Rs 10 crore for BDF has been questioned. AIREA is expected to discuss the issue at length and revert to BDF regarding fresh trade contributions.

This isn't the first time that BDF has found that geographical indication (GI) branding of the Indian basmati is crucial. In the late 90s, in the aftermath of the Rice Tec assault on the basmati patent and the run-up to the 2002 victories protecting the uniqueness of the aromatic rice, the then BPDF and APEDA jointly called for an agency pitch that drew the best of the nation, ranging from Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA), Ammirati Puris Lintas, McCann-Erickson, Rediffusion Dentsu Young and Rubicam and RK Swamy BBDO. Finally, Rediffusion was hired. But confusion over how best to propagate the virtually self-propelling and self-recommendatory rice grain prevailed even then.

In 2002, the commerce ministry launched Rs 1.6-crore basmati blitz in the US. At the time, APEDA had proposed its much-hyped 'Produce of India' logo for the Indian Basmati.

