

THE LUX PRINCESSES



While marketers sign celeb endorsers to add 'star appeal' to brands, Lux's legacy ends up reinforcing the prima donna status of Bollywood actresses. Nandini Raghavendra & N Shatrujeet explore this unique relationship

NOWADAYS, two adjectives that literally jump at you every time there are reports of brand marketers signing on A-grade Bollywood endorsers are 'whopping' and 'astronomical'. The words, quite obviously, refer to the monetary aspect of the deal—and while no one cares to disclose the exact sum that changes hands, even conservative guesstimates invariably peg the figure upwards of Rs 7 crore. Marketers, it appears, are gladly parting with a king's ransom in the fond hope that some of the endorser's tinsel dust rubs on to the brand.

This, it could be argued, has always been the case. The world over, marketers are known to hanker after celebrity endorsers. What's fairly interesting, though, is that there are rare instances where celebrities nurse ambitions of endorsing one particular brand. In these cases, it's the celebrity who sees the brand association as being one that enhances his or her value in the public's eye. Soap brand Lux is one such case in point.

Ever since the legendary Leela Chitnis first appeared in an ad for the brand in 1941, generations of Bollywood actresses have secretly cherished the dream of endorsing Lux. For one simple reason: a Lux endorsement almost serves as a rite of passage, an endorsement of the celebrity's 'star appeal'. Juhi Chawla, who along with Aishwarya Rai, has the distinction of endorsing the brand for the longest period of time, recalls her reaction when she was offered a deal from Lux immediately after the release of *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*. "I was thrilled," she says. "For years, I had looked up to stars like Hemaji (Hema Malini, who's also endorsed the brand), and here I was being offered Lux. I kept thinking, 'Oh my goodness, I had arrived!' It gave me the biggest high. I wanted as much to part of Lux as they wanted me to be part of the campaign."

One of the primary reasons behind the brand's allure is its 'movie star' legacy—the brand has been endorsed by almost every well-known Bollywood actress, and simply being part of that 'hall of fame' is one hell of a draw. Priyanka Chopra, who endorses the brand today, signed on Lux at the time when the book *Lux—Inspiring Beauty* was being launched. "I met many other stars who'd been a part of the whole legacy... Hema Malini, Juhi Chawla. It was a great feeling being associated with them," she says. Saira Banu recalls how her mother, the famous Naseem Banu, initially turned down a Lux offer as endorsing a brand was "considered very low profile in those days". She however adds that with some convincing Naseem Banu came around as "somehow she felt closer to Lux". Saira Banu herself endorsed the brand in the 1960s—after much convincing and an intervention from her mother. "I did Lux out of bonhomie and camaraderie. I have never endorsed another product, but am happy about Lux. It's a nice mother-daughter story and I continued the legacy of Naseem Banu," she says.

Cynics can be excused for believing that all this talk of 'convincing' essentially involved negotiations over money. Amazing though it may sound in today's mercenary times, that was never the case. Kedar Apte, marketing manager, Hindustan Unilever (HUL), points out that till the

an ambassador doesn't live up to the Lux values, we can't sign her on. There are very Bollywood stars who embody the Lux values and some of them may already be endorsing other soap brands. This leaves us with little choice and that is an issue," Apte admits. He, however, quickly adds that

on two occasions not very long ago, Lux endorsers had the option of not renewing their contracts and going with competitive brands, instead. "On both occasions, they didn't go and stayed with Lux," he says. "That's the power of this brand." Another issue—and this is

one that's perhaps unique to Lux—pertains to endorser fees. While once in might have been fine to endorse Lux for a lark, today all that counts is the size of the deal. Chawla says that even though it was not the 'figures' that excited her when she first signed on Lux, the perspective has changed today. Responding to whether she'd still do a Lux ad for free if she were making a Bollywood debut today, Chawla says: "It's impossible to compare to a time say, even six years ago. Today nearly every ad has a

movie star!" Chopra, for her part, chooses to answer the question thus: "Maybe one. Just to be part of the legacy." That legacy is clearly something that Lux continues to bank upon and draw from. Apte is confident that even today, the quid pro quo that Lux offers Bollywood actresses helps keep endorsement rates down. This holds true even within brands belonging to the same company—having Priyanka Chopra as an endorser costs Pong's more than it costs Lux, Apte admits.

leaf out of Lux's rulebook and are signing on actresses. For another, Apte says finding endorsers with the right brand fit narrows the

field even further. "We research continuously to see how consumers rate existing or potential endorsers in terms of brand fit. If

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world over, and this a magical fit for most movie stars," he says. Yet, Apte adds that the brand is very choosy when it comes to selecting endorsers—a fact that the long string of Lux endorsers belies. "We won't bank on someone who's untested or is a one-movie wonder," he says, adding that this is where the prospective endorser's pipeline of releases becomes critical. For that matter, even an existing endorser's two-to-three-year pipeline is critical. "We keep a very close track of the star's career. We know exactly what her professional growth chart looks like. This is critical when signing new or renewing contracts," Apte says.

That said, it is increasingly becoming difficult for Lux to find bankable endorsers. For one, competitive brands have taken a