

(\$)cent Of The Woman

Moinak Mitra

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THE FAVOURITE OF THE FILMSTARS. THE JOURNEY OF BRAND LUX IS AS BEAUTIFUL AS THE FACES THAT ENDORSE IT



he Beauty Soap of 'The' Filmstars. Not just any old filmstar, the filmstars that truly matter. The first ever Lux ad featured Leela Chitnis promising smooth skin all the way back in 1929. As the brand gained traction, it never lost sight of its Bollywood connect — Madhubala in the 1950s; Wahida Rehman, Saira Banu, Parveen Babi, Simi Grewal in the 1960s and 70s; Hema Malini, Zeenat Aman, Poonam Dhillon, Rati Agnihotri in the 1980s; Juhi Chawla, Madhuri Dixit, Sridevi, Karisma Kapoor in the 1990s; Rani Mukherji, Kareena Kapoor, Aishwarya Rai and Priyanka Chopra now. For 81 years now, for filmstars and ordinary Indians, Lux has been one of India's most endearing brands, and sitting inside the new 13-acre steel-and-glass HUL Mumbai campus, Sudhan-shu Vats, VP, home care & skin cleansing, tells us why.

Vats, a marathon runner in his own words, has been working on the Lux brand for two years now. Going the distance is not new to him. In the past, he has nurtured and grown brands such as Lipton, Vim, Wheel, Domex and even been HUL's vanguard for modern trade. The 43-year-old has been with Levers for 18 years of his life, and sustaining the Lux brand now and taking it to the next level is his biggest challenge. With a 14.7% market share in terms of value and 14.2% volume share, the soap brand is still clearly the leader in its category and among the Rs 1,000-crore plus luminaries in HUL's Top 5 brand quiver. However, the challenge for any market leader is to never

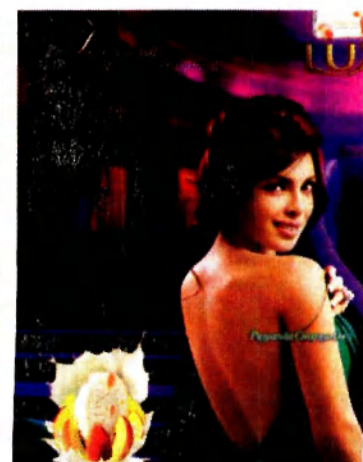
get complacent. "The beauty of big brands is that they change, yet they don't change," says Vats.

Recently, the brand experimented with Bollywood actors — Shahrukh Khan and Abhishek Bachchan. Despite the obviously feminine campaigns that agency JWT dished out for Lux over the years, the usage of the brand actually showed a gender split. So the 2005 campaign with Shahrukh Khan featured him in the foreground but flanked by a bevy of Bollywood hotties who had featured in Lux ads over the years — to commemorate 75 years of the brand's existence. Even the current Abhishek Bachchan-Aishwarya Rai campaign, represents this new playful theme with a game of blind man's buff, where Abhishek is trying to get hold of Aishwarya and her soft skin. On a recent sales visit to Barabanki in UP, Vats was caught by surprise at the popularity of the Abhi-Ash jingle in the ad campaign, used as mobile caller tunes, played on local radio stations and blaring on loudspeakers.

While the overarching Lux message has remained more or less intact over the years, the brand promise has shifted with growing affluence. It is no longer the standard white and rose bars that the company hawks; instead the core SKUs are strawberry and peach with lotus as the third variant. "You can't leave it at rose because it's too accessible," says Vats. The formulation of the soap has been shifting gears since the 1990s, when floral notes like jasmine and lavender held sway. "As the consumer evolves, his or her preference for fragrance changes from basic to more complex notes," adds Vats. The current fruity fragrances seem to complement the mood of the times.

The brand has also kept up with the times by graduating from soap bars to shower gels and has emerged as the leading brand in the body wash segment. Soap bars have kept up too. Lux was the first to introduce soap bars with fruit bits in them.

And while the urban consumer laps up these developments, the brand today has been made available at more accessible price points to drive sales



THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT LUX

- The brand name Lux has been derived from Luxury
- In 1900, British soap manufacturer, William Hesketh Lever re-launched Sunlight flakes as Lux for washing woolen fabrics. Lux toilet soap first appeared in 1925 in the United States and cashed in on the flakes' reputation
- In 1926, Ginger Rogers, the dancing diva, was the first Hollywood great to appear in a Lux commercial. It was from here onwards that Lux found a permanent place in the luxurious baths of Los Angeles marbled mansions. Since then some of the glorious Hollywood ladies have graced Lux commercials - Michelle Pfeiffer, Elizabeth Taylor, Sophia Loren, Penelope Cruz, Catherine Zeta Jones, Racquel Welch, Liv Tyler, Charlize Theron, to name a few
- Since Leela Chitnis in 1929, Bollywood beauties throughout ages have appeared in Lux commercials. Till date, nearly 50 Bollywood heroines have featured in Lux ads. In the early 1970s, Jayalalitha, a prominent figure in politics today, featured in a Lux ad, when she was in the prime of her acting career
- The first bar of Lux was made in India and sold for a princely sum of two annas in 1934



in rural markets. Vats says that whenever he travels to the hinterland, he sees consumers demanding a Rs 10 Lux. "Now that sentiment is shared across the country and ingrained in the psyche of village folk," says Vats. In a price sensitive market like India, despite the northbound affluence curve, accessible currency price points act as both convenience and affordability levers.

Vats sells about 100 crore Lux cakes every year. The challenge is to sell it not just across the rural-urban chasm, but to consumers that use the brand from SEC-A to SEC-E, from a teenager to a 60-year-old.

How can relevance thrive in such disparity? Vats and his team do the thinking by scouting the length and breadth of the country with a nose for nuances. "For example, big is beautiful in Punjab," he quips, explaining why the Rs 65 Lux SKU does so well up North as a 125 gm x 4 pack. So far, the marathon man has been able to keep the brand relevant and contemporary but as he himself agrees, "Heritage is important but you can never rest on your laurels. After all every 20 years, only 30% of the companies remain in Fortune 500."

moinak.mitra@hulgroup.com