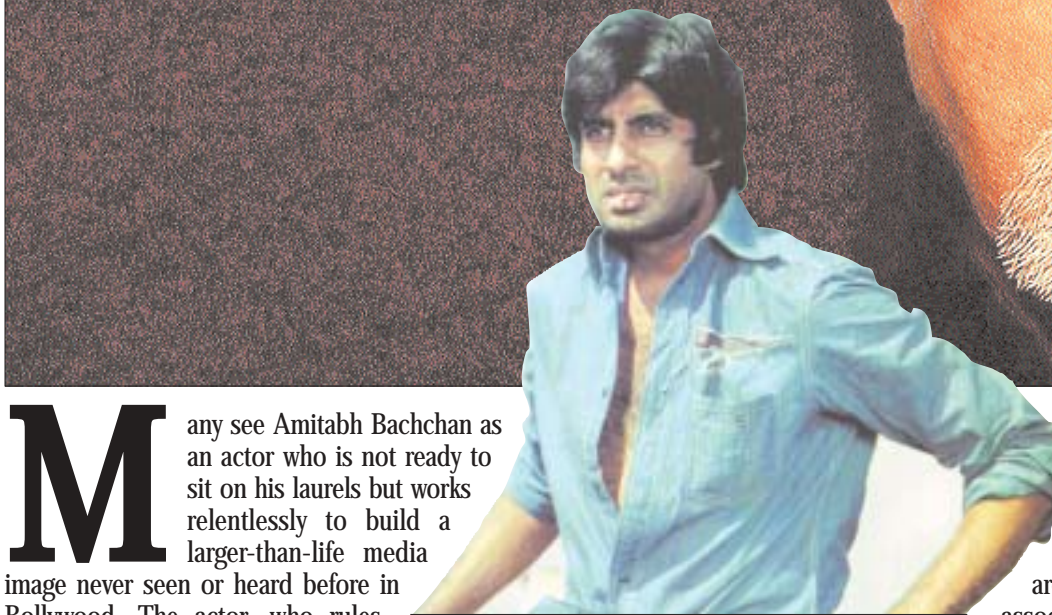


AMITABH: Global brand with an Indian face



Many see Amitabh Bachchan as an actor who is not ready to sit on his laurels but works relentlessly to build a larger-than-life media image never seen or heard before in Bollywood. The actor, who rules both the small and the silver screens, has entrenched himself so deeply in the endorsement arena that he is giving the three Khans — Shah Rukh, Aamir and Salman — a run for their money.

According to media reports, Bachchan's take home last year was around Rs. 190 million (\$4 million), far more than mega star Shah Rukh Khan, who earned Rs. 130 million (\$3 million). Khan's earnings include his endorsement deals for Pepsi, Hyundai Santro and Lux. What really sets Bachchan apart from other ageing big stars is while most have faded into oblivion or been reduced to doing father or uncle roles, the Big B, as he is called, rules the roost even at 64.

The small screen played an important role in giving him a new lease of life. After a rough patch in the 1990s, he barged into Indian homes with one of the most popular quiz shows of Indian television 'Kaun Banega Crorepati' (KBC). There has been no looking back for him since then.

"We want to reinforce his image of being a global brand and also as the most saleable face of India. He has about a dozen endorsement offers," Sunil Doshi, CEO of Alliance Media and Entertainment, the company that manages Bachchan's endorsements, was quoted as saying when the second season of KBC began. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Doshi has surpassed his own expectations with Bachchan becoming one of the most commonly seen faces on the small screen.

Bachchan is endorsing everything — from pens to cars to hair oils to chocolates. His reach can be estimated from the fact that he was signed as a brand ambassador for Reid and Taylor. Earlier, Hollywood actor Pierce Brosnan endorsed the product.

"Amitabh Bachchan is an icon with a universal appeal and has helped us reach out to the real 'Bharat'. While it is too early to quantify the results of our new campaign, our business associates are extremely excited about Mr. Bachchan's association with Reid and Taylor," Tarun Joshi

of Reid and Taylor said.

"In fact, agents and retailers have told us that customers have started asking about the 'Amitabh wali suiting'," Joshi said.

An All-India 2005 Celebrity Track Survey conducted by Hansa Research amongst respondents aged 15-50 years ranked Bachchan at the top. Big B also topped a celebrity likeness poll for two consecutive years — 2003 and 2004.

Describing his phenomenal success after KBC, well-known filmmaker Ravi Chopra, who signed Bachchan for his superhit 'Baghban', said: "When he was doing KBC, I think the whole process helped him and people got a feeling that he is a very genuine person. People looked at him as a fatherly figure and believed that he will not give wrong suggestions. People started to respect him so much that they started believing what he said. And this image worked for the manufacturers. When I see an ad that has Amitji, I feel, 'He is saying it, then it must be true'. Because people look at him with respect."

When Bachchan debuted on the small screen, the risk factor was high because at that time he was perceived as a waning actor, failed politician and businessman doubled under heavy debt. This, despite a three-decade-long successful innings in Bollywood.

With KBC's phenomenal success, not only did Bollywood throw open its doors for Big B again, the endorsement offers started pouring in as well. His larger-than-life image made him one of the most expensive celebrities endorsing brands. His endorsements apparently cost upwards of Rs. 50 million. And such his is allure that, despite the high rate, Indian and multinational companies make a beeline for him. And they are not regretting their decision. ■