

ANALYSIS

Power of Teflon brands

Salman Khan manages to stay above all controversies even as his peers and strong consumer brands crumble under pressure



Neither court cases, nor anger over his insensitive comments diminishes his appeal on screen and off it

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The first weekend, the make-or-break weekend as Bollywood has come to dub it, is just behind us and, by all accounts, Salman Khan's *Sultan* is going to be one of the biggest box office earners of the year. Right ahead of *Sultan*'s launch, Khan had managed to land himself into a mess with his now infamous 'raped woman' comment. But his brand value (on screen and as an endorser), remained unaffected. According to a celebrity valuation report by **RBSA Advisors**, Khan's estimated brand value based on projected endorsement income is pegged at a whopping ₹815.53 crore. And in 2015, he topped the list of celebrity brand ambassadors with ₹148.5 crore as endorsement earnings.

No matter how much slur is thrown at him, nothing sticks. Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan, to an extent, don a similar mantle, but none can yet match Salman. In this age of

social media when brands are more vulnerable, he seems to be above everything else. Consumer brands have had to undergo a trial by fire to regain their lost trust, post a crisis. Think Maggi, Coke, Pepsi and a host of others. As has Aamir Khan (see table) after his comments on religious intolerance, so what separates one Khan from the other, or a Maggi from a Salman?

Terms of engagement

"Celebrity brand valuations do not usually dip overnight, as these are based on long-term contracts, while a consumer reaction to a product brand is much more instantaneous," explains N Chandramouli, CEO of brand intelligence company TRA. Also brands that sign on Khan seem to have discounted the fact that this 'macho', quintessential 'bad boy' is likely to be hit by controversies at some point or the other.

Samit Sinha, founder and managing partner, Alchemist Brand Consulting, points out another difference between celebrity and consumer

CELEBRITY BRAND TABLE

Present value of estimated income from endorsements to be earned over the actors' balance career spans

Celebrity	Brand value based on projected endorsement income
Salman Khan	815.53
Shah Rukh Khan	741.92
Deepika Padukone	519.73
Hrithik Roshan	330.25
Akshay Kumar	278.5
Amitabh Bachchan	277.27
Priyanka Chopra	111.47
Aamir Khan	92.64

All figures in ₹ crore; Source: **RBSA Advisors**
Note: Estimates based on various criteria such as average annual revenue, box office collections, fees charged per day per endorsement, etc.

brands. He says that there is always a balance of power, which is more often than not tilted in favour of the celebrity. "With big celebs, there is an imbalance of power, especially when small brands sign them. In case of a big multinational, however, there is more equitable distribution of power," Sinha says. The two play by different rules and are hence incomparable.

Salman can't be compared to the rest of Bollywood either; he looms way above the rest. According to **RBSA**, he earns ₹4.5 crore per day from his endorsements, while his arch rival and another leading star Shah Rukh Khan earns about a crore less — ₹3.5 crore per day. The next three on the list are Amitabh Bachchan (₹2.75 crore), Aamir Khan (₹2.5 crore) and Deepika Padukone (₹2 crore) respectively.

When it comes to estimated earnings from endorsements in 2015, Padukone pipped Aamir — earning ₹48 crore against his ₹33.75 crore, indicating that she has more brands in her bag. Padukone is also way ahead of Aamir in projected brand valuations for 2016, but Chandramouli says women unfortunately hit a glass ceiling and hence her rise will meet its fall. Aamir, though, unlike Salman is vulnerable to social media rants as his ranking show.

Playing to the gallery

Salman's brand power stems from his box office sway, say experts. His strong appeal among audiences in the hinterland is his big strength. He is what the industry terms a mass market brand. The picture is clearer when we take a look at his endorsement portfolio: Relaxo, Thums Up, Astral Pipes, Revital among others. Rival Shah Rukh has Swiss watch brand Tag Heuer, jewellery brand Gitanjali, e-grocery BigBasket.com, Dish TV, Videocon among others — a mix of mass and premium brands.

Amitabh Bachchan is also said to hold mass appeal with his reach cutting across generations. But Chandramouli says, "He is seen endorsing everything from a bank to *chyanprash*. There is a problem of overuse." As for Shah Rukh, while his movies have not done very well at the box office in the recent past, his image is that of an all-rounder, a businessman, sports enthusiast and a family-man. And this works for many brands.

Both have seen their fair share of controversies and over the past year or so, their armour has taken a few hits — Bachchan with the Panama controversy and Shah Rukh over his run-ins with cricket administrators. Salman has withstood far graver charges of misconduct. Samit Sinha has an interesting explanation. Social media rants which bring down celebrities and product brands are mostly limited to an urban audience. Khan's appeal lies among a much wider spectrum of the Indian market whose faith in his value is unshakable, as yet.