

Why Brand Hrithik is in a Class of Its Own

He's one of Bollywood's hottest heartthrobs, but that's not the only reason marketers of luxury and aspirational labels gravitate towards the silver screen's Greek god

:: Ishani Duttagupta

A Hrithik Roshan-starrer is a bit like Christmas: it tends to come once a year. Consider: *Bang Bang*, which has Hrithik in the lead role and is set for release on October 2, comes a full year after his last film *Krrish 3*. And fans will have to wait for at least another year for the next Hrithik flick – Ashutosh Gowariker's *Mohenjo Daro*.

The lack of visibility – relative to, for instance, the three Khans – coupled with the very public separation from his wife may tempt you to conclude that the Hrithik magic is on the wane. Fans of the 'Greek God' of Bollywood may disagree – and the brands that are riding on the star will certainly rubbish that notion. Marketers in the know point out that Hrithik still commands a fee of between ₹2 crore and ₹3 crore per brand endorsement, not far behind what Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan pocket for similar activities (see *How They Stack Up*).

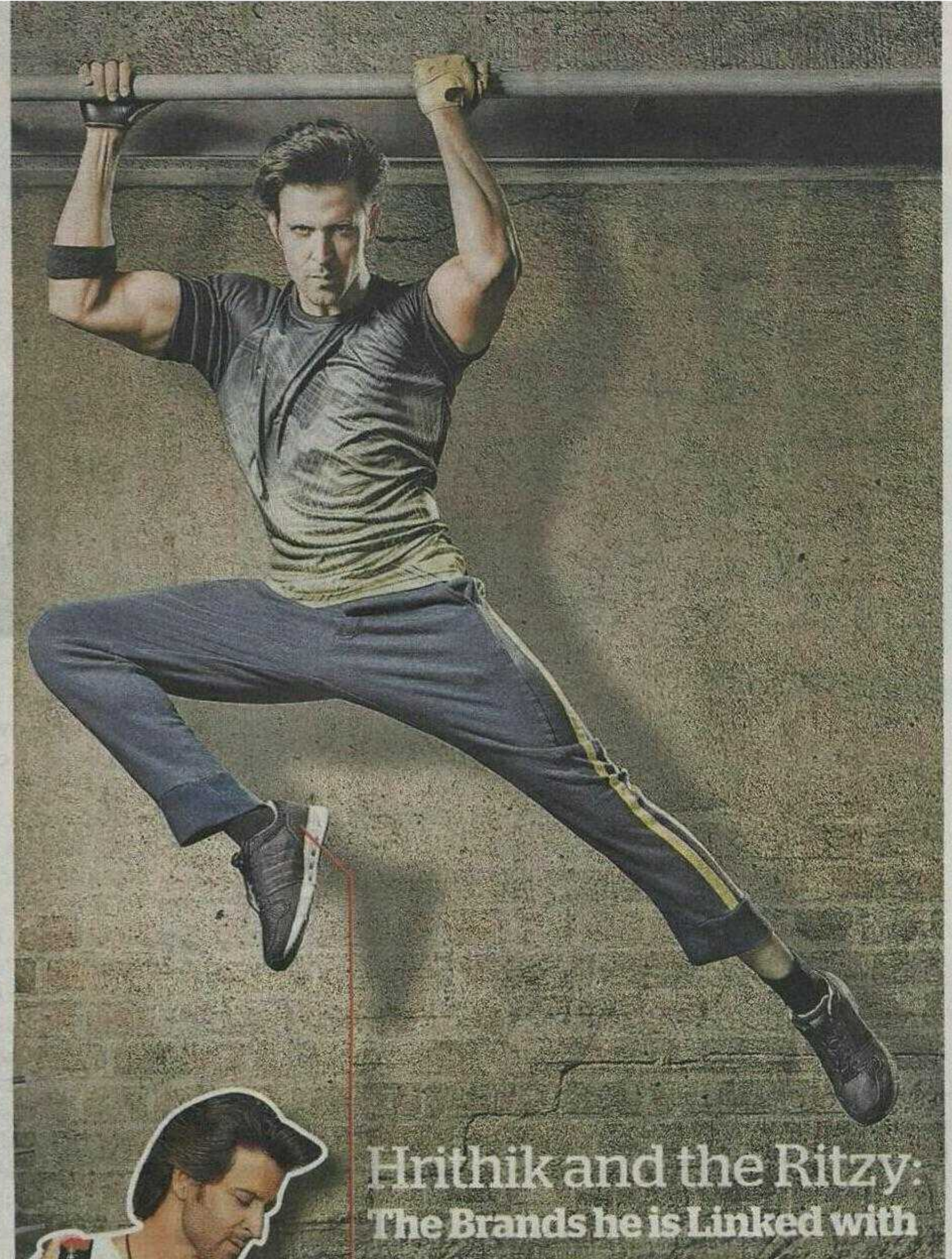
Marketers Keen to Bet Big

So what is the unique value that Hrithik brings to his brand portfolio?

According to the man himself, it's the formula of putting all his eggs in one basket that works both in selecting films and brand endorsements. In his 14 years in Bollywood, he has been very selective about films and done only 17 compared with 50-plus by some of his counterparts in this period.

"It's not how well dressed you are or your good looks that are your strength. My strength is the character that comes through when I interpret the moment and the experiences that shine through my countenance, which are most important both for the brands that I endorse as well as the roles that I play in films," he told *ET Magazine* in an exclusive interview. In short, he is an actor before anything else and the rest comes as a by-product. "The movies are where my success comes from but I also like spreading awareness about the brands that I work with. That's as much a part of my work as are the movies," he adds.

Marketers who are



Hrithik and the Ritzy: The Brands he is Linked with



Myntra: Collaborated with Hrithik for an active **lifestyle apparel** and **casual wear collection** under the **HRX** brand

HE: A **deo** from **Emami**, it is targeted at the new alpha male in the age group of 18-35 years

Rado: Brand ambassador for the **Swiss watch brand in India**; recently Rado launched a TV campaign featuring Hrithik for the new **DiaMaster collection** and extended the relationship with him for three more years

J. Hampstead: His physique and Greek god looks fit well with a brand that aims to be **fashionable and stylish** and is aimed at young achievers

OPPO Mobiles: The Chinese smartphone brand features Hrithik and Sonam Kapoor in a **TV commercial for its N1 range**

Mountain Dew: Has done some daring stunts for the TV ads of the **soft drink brand**



SRK, SK & HR: How they Stack up

SRK

PROMINENT BRANDS:
**Hyundai India,
TAG Heuer, Kansai
Nerolac Paints**

AVERAGE ESTIMATED FEE
PER ENDORSEMENT:

₹8 crore
for three days*

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE:
Panache



willing to place their bets on him agree that it's his personality that brings value for their brands. "We signed him on three years back and have now extended our relationship by three more years," says Matthias Breschan, CEO of Swiss watch company Rado. "Hrithik is the perfect fit for us as brand ambassador not only because he is a young and dynamic celebrity actor who is willing to take risks but he is also very accessible."

For his part, Hrithik reckons he already had a history with the company because he had seen his father wearing the brand. "It anchored my childhood in a way, because as a boy I wanted to become the man that my father was. Like many of the other brands that I endorse, Rado too has a resonance of values that I stand for," he says.

To that extent, Hrithik may have a natural connect with Rado that transcends commerce – much like the association of Roger Federer with Mercedes-Benz. The tennis player lends his poise and success to the brand, and it also helps that he is a long-time fan of Merc.

Getting Personal

Siyaram Silk Mills, which owns the premium fabric and apparel brand J Hampstead, which has been associated with Hrithik for three years, also extended the contract recently. "He is a perfect balance of class and splendour with the Greek god looks. J Hampstead is stylish, fashionable and aimed at young achievers and no one else comes close to defining style, persona and sophistication. For us, Hrithik was the best fit for the brand," says N Gangadhar, vice-president, marketing, Siyaram Silk Mills.

The challenges on the personal front, and how he overcame them, also fit well with a few brands he is associated with. Example: PepsiCo's Mountain Dew. "For the consumers he is seen as someone who has confronted numerous challenging situations to emerge a winner," says a PepsiCo spokesperson.

For Mountain Dew, the metaphor of a challenge takes on a more physical hue, courtesy of the action and stunts Hrithik performs in the television commercial for the brand – in sync with the tagline, 'Darr ke aage jeet hai' (beyond fear lies victory).

The ability to push himself to cover that extra mile is also one key reason for online fashion brand Myntra tying up with Hrithik to create, manufacture and retail an active lifestyle apparel and casual wear collection



Salman Khan

PROMINENT BRANDS:
**Thums Up, Yatra.com, Suzuki,
Wheel detergent, Tiger biscuits**

AVERAGE ESTIMATED FEE PER ENDORSEMENT:

₹4 crore per day*

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE: **Mass appeal**

"The movies are where my success comes from but I also like spreading awareness about the brands that I work with. That's as much a part of my work as are the movies"

Hrithik Roshan

AVERAGE ESTIMATED FEE PER ENDORSEMENT:

₹2-3 crore for an assignment*

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE: **Great face and
physique, action and dance**

*Industry estimates



under the brand name HRX. "The brand was launched to personify the qualities and values Hrithik truly believes in. HRX is based on Hrithik's philosophy which he developed through trials and tribulations and successes. It symbolizes the 'go-getter' attitude that youngsters today wear on their sleeves and thrive on," says Ganesh Subramanian, chief operating officer, Myntra. Unsurprisingly, HRX's tag line is 'Push Your Extreme'.

More than Star Power

Many stars are chosen by brands as ambassadors purely for their success at the box office. A few, though, bring along something more. For instance, John Travolta, an ambassador for Swiss watchmaker Breitling, is, in addition to being an actor, also a pilot. Similarly, the 'go-getter' image, although not as tangible as Travolta's skills as a pilot, may well be Hrithik's 'plus' point.

What also sets Hrithik apart from other star endorsers is that his aura transcends the local. That's one reason why Emami chose him recently when launching a deo called HE. "Hrithik, with his varied repertoire of films, has an international appeal that resonates with every age group," explains an Emami spokesperson.

The physical attributes – great face, great physique – are of course a huge draw. And what sets him apart from others with good looks and bodies is the "grooming, style, fashion and athleticism" that he brings to the table, says Sumanto Chattopadhyay, executive creative director at Ogilvy & Mather. "Other stars endorse brands too, but when Hrithik does it, he truly fits the bill," he adds.

Chinese mobile phone maker OPPO Mobiles, for one, certainly believes Hrithik is the right fit. "We chose him to endorse our brand because he is a perfect blend of good looks, attitude and strength and definitely a youth icon," says Tom Lu, CEO, OPPO Mobiles India.

The Premium Value

It isn't always a perfect fit and, when an association begins to fray at the seams, Hrithik has been quick to snap ties. "When I realized that I didn't enjoy working for a particular brand, I separated myself from it in a dignified manner and walked my path," Hrithik told ET Magazine, without naming the brand in question.

Being choosy about the films and ads may not do much for Hrithik's mass appeal, but then it does add a bit of premiumness to his image, which explains why it's mostly luxury and lifestyle labels that have tied up with him. "In sheer brand positioning terms, it is good strategy. Whether it happens by circumstance or design isn't important; what is important is that it is good for Hrithik who remains a very bankable face. His unique format of acting is all about action and dance. He combines both with his candy face image very well," says brand expert and consultant Harish Bijoor.

Bijoor points out another critical difference between Hrithik and the rest of Bollywood's endorsers: he represents the new and aspirational young Indian rather than the typical macho male stereotype. Which also leads to the other unique factor about Brand Hrithik: he may not be the biggest superstar in Bollywood but he is perhaps a more bankable brand endorser than an actor. And both Hrithik and the brands piggybacking on him aren't complaining. ■