

The Return of The Indian Macho

More Indian men are buying grooming and cosmetic products than ever before. Just don't call them metrosexuals

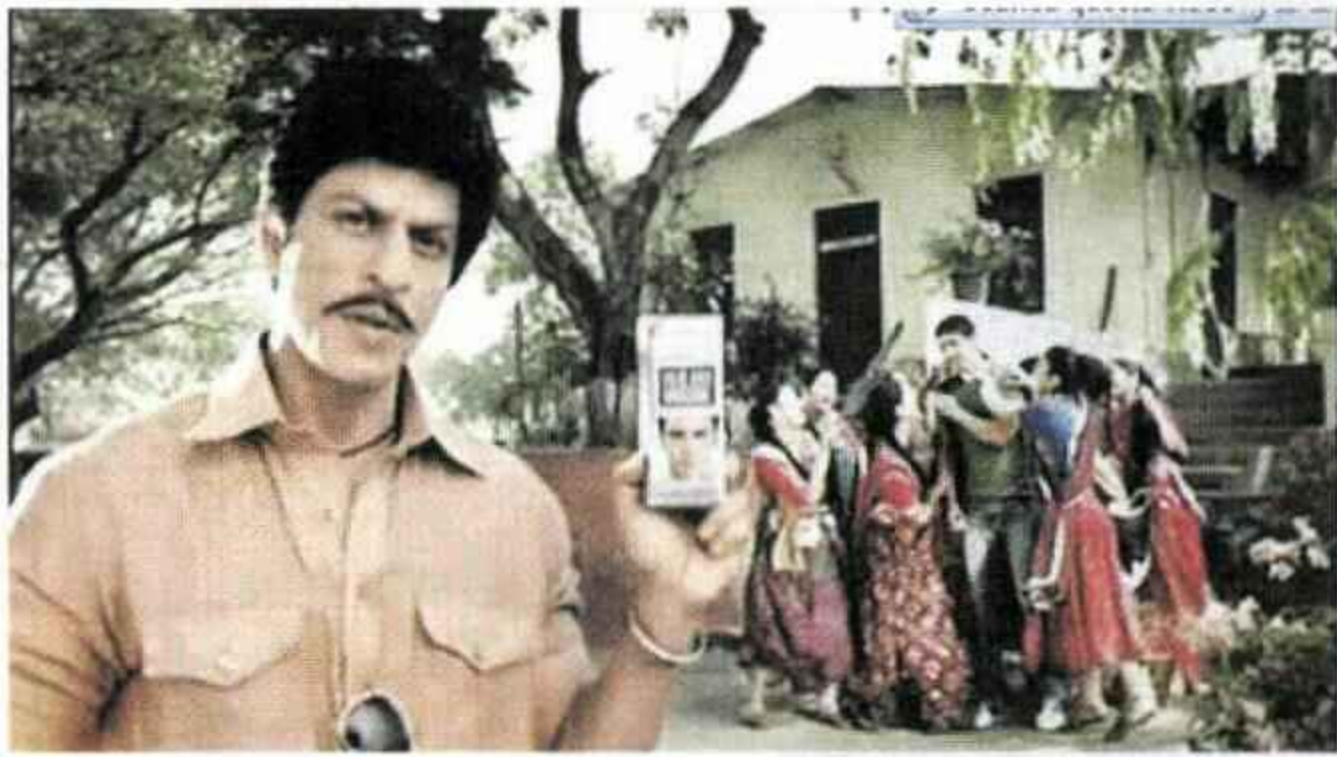
Rajiv Singh

“We are the original *mard* of FMCG sector as we were the first ones in India to launch fairness cream exclusively for men in 2004,” says Mohan Goenka, director of Emami. It's a remark that sets the tone for India's bizarre tryst with men's grooming products. Journalist Mark Simpson coined the term metrosexual way back in 1994, only to see it pick up steam and get flogged across presentations and conference rooms through the early 2000s. It referred to men who cared deeply about personal appearances and were not averse to a skin or beauty regimen.

In India, this market existed for decades if FMCG majors are to be believed. “The bane of the FMCG sector is that men were always forced to use women's products,” says Anil Kulkarni, business director of JK Helen Curtis. A popular urban legend around HUL's Fair & Lovely, the leading fairness cream in the market was that the majority of its users were men. Which brings us to the launch of Emami's Fair & Handsome at a time when the metrosexual movement had caught the world's fancy.

Ever since, FMCG brands of various stripes have been eagerly hopping on the bandwagon, hoping to cash in on male vanity and push sales in a subdued market bogged down by slowdown, rising inflation and a cut in discretionary spend by consumers over the last few quarters. The male grooming market in India is expected to grow by a CAGR of 11% to reach ₹5,300 crore by 2016, says a Euromonitor study.





Fair & Handsome

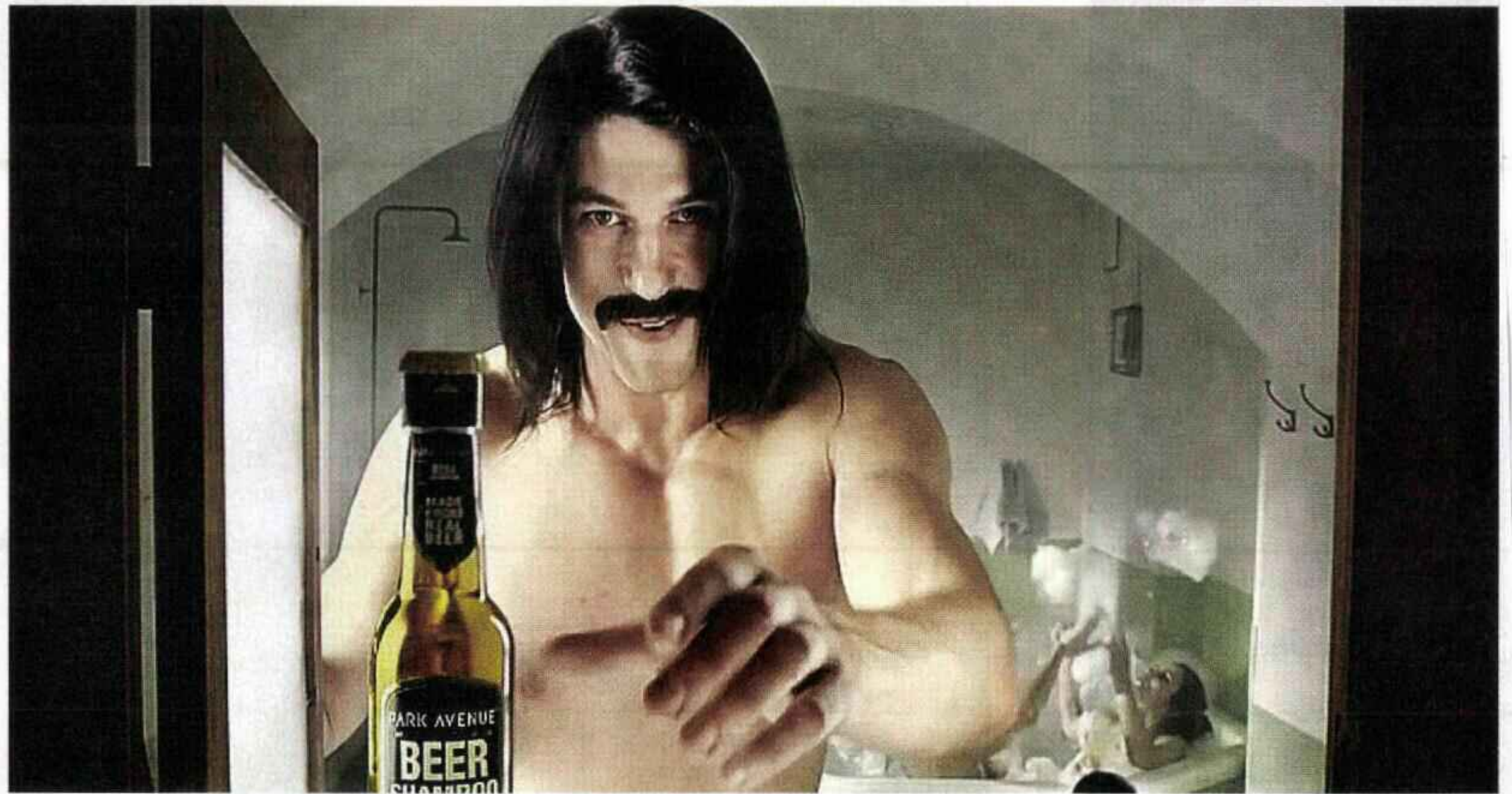
Little wonder then that brands are jostling to enter the space.

Traditionally female targeted brands like Nivea have created an entire range for men and Vaseline which used to be known for its petroleum jelly has emerged with a complete skin treatment range for men.

While the ads previously focused on more metrosexual friendly themes like confidence and looking good, in India and to a lesser extent in other markets, there has been a conscious attempt at moving these products into a more macho space. Last year, a global commercial for Dove Men's Care Shampoo drew a lot of viral traction. It featured a man with the kind of wavy hair that no one other than Chris Hemsworth in his Thor avatar could pull off and ended with the rebuke "Women's shampoo is not for you."

It's a trick the "mard" of the FMCG sector has been pulling off for several years now; prominently through a memorable commercial featuring Shahrukh Khan mocking a wrestler for wearing *ladkiyon waali* fairness cream. Even if its more recent commercial moved into a slightly more dignified space, the category code appears to have been carved in stone. Preceding the launch of its Head &

Park Avenue Beer Shampoo



Shoulders For Men variant, P&G has inundated the brand's Facebook page with messages like 'Guys, stop using up your lady's flowery smelling shampoo.' And then the communication moves on to target the opposite sex. 'Ladies! We bet you don't enjoy it when your man smells like a meadow of flowers' — says one of the posts on the page. And there's another one: 'Ladies, don't you just hate that moment when you step in the shower and the shampoo bottle is wiped clean by your guy.'

It's not just advertising but entire products in the male grooming segment that are being built around macho themes. For instance the Raymond's Park Avenue Beer Shampoo with its tagline 'Cheers to Man Hair.' Says Kulkarni, "Men are from Mars and women are from Venus. And when we came up with beer shampoo last year, we celebrated this fact."

Of course, advertising is not creating

trends here but merely piggybacking on a strong existing sentiment. The dominant trends in Bollywood over the last few years point towards a huge return of the macho hero. Some of the biggest hits over the last few years have been about square jawed iron willed men punching their way through life's big problems: films like *Dabangg* and its sequel and *Rowdy Rathod*.

Sure, Indian men do want a more metrosexual lifestyle, but they balk at being identified or branded as such. And so, the layer of macho posturing to give the entire exercise an air of guilt free indulgence. Marketing consultant Suvodeep Das argues "The 'mard' was always there. He just didn't have products across categories." Goenka believes the machoisation is well underway, "In next 10-15 years, you won't be able to find men using women's products."

However, there are some who don't think

that too much should be read into the move by men to lap up personal care products made exclusively for them. "I don't see any change in men's psyche," confesses Piyush Pandey, executive chairman and chief creative officer, South Asia Ogilvy & Mather. "It's the marketers who are exploring and tweaking products for new segments."

However such a segmentation, feel marketers, does have a flip side as well. "The brand could appeal to a very niche target audience and hence restrict its potential," says Das. Shripad Nadkarni founder of MarketGate Consulting too sounds a word of caution. There may be a gap in the market but there needs to be a market in the gap, he says. "Targeting a new segment for the sake of being different could be counter-productive."

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