

Aamir is a great actor – but you can't be the ambassador and run your brand down

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Industries Secretary Amitabh Kant, the man who many years back created the Incredible India brand, recently tore into Aamir's comments. "I didn't want to get into this. But I'm the creator of Incredible India, I have sweated for it, I built the brand from scratch, and that is why I said what I said – and I only said it in response to a question at the NID Convocation," he clarifies, before spelling out his views in greater detail. "See, in a democracy, people must express their viewpoints. I am personally a great fan of Aamir and I have watched all his movies. He's a brilliant, brilliant actor. There are very few actors with a soul and with commitment – and he is one of them. He is outstanding as far as his acting, and his commitment to India, is concerned. You need people like him. But what I am responding to is the question about the role of a Brand Ambassador: Being the ambassador of a brand gives you a certain responsibility. You then can't speak a language contrary to the brand messaging that you're sending out. If you are saying as an ambassador that India is Incredible, and simultaneously saying that India is Intolerant, then you are sending out a very contrarian message. You are doing great disservice to the brand".

How should Aamir have handled it, then? "If Aamir Khan had a contrarian viewpoint, he should have picked up the phone, called the Tourism Minister and conveyed his concerns, and then said I don't want to be the brand ambassador of Incredible India, quit and gone – and then made his comments. That is fine. You can't be the brand ambassa-

dor of India and then say India is intolerant. That is totally wrong, that is unethical. You want to attract tourism or you want to go out of India? No brand anywhere in the world will accept this. This is a basic contradiction in terms. While I admire his commitment to social causes, his comments were totally off the mark. In a democracy, everybody speaks out, but you can't say these things as the brand ambassador of Incredible India."

Is it essential to replace an actor with another in such a role? "No, we need not have a Bollywood actor at all. In fact, to attract international tourists, you need international actors who are known globally, who have travelled here and gone back. It has to be the other way round. An Indian actor can only promote domestic tourism. It's OK for a state to have a brand ambassador – Amitabh Bachchan has a certain fascination for India and he will attract tourists from all over the country to Gujarat. An actor is a very good medium for providing impetus to domestic tourism, for a state to promote tourism."

"We are looking for American, European tourists. None of our actors are known that well abroad. If you want to establish India abroad, you need an internationally established actor to be your brand ambassador. When he talks about India, people abroad should stop and listen. In fact, you need different people to promote specialised areas – you ideally need an ambassador for Buddhism, for spirituality, perhaps another for ayurveda and yoga, another for adventure. Bollywood actors are good for promoting tourism within the domestic market, and they work for Atithi Devo Bhava – but they are not going to work as the faces of India, internationally, and attract tourists here. Even internally, there is a lack of understanding about tourism. It has to be handled very professionally. It's not about the actor – it's about utilising him through a storyline, creativity, the capturing of the fascination for India. It needs brilliant advertising, putting the creativity into it – not just appointing an ambassador."

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– Amitabh Kant



In December 2014, Naren Facebook after a meeting



Aamir Khan met Modi in June 2014 for the Vote for Change campaign on Satyamev Jayate

