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BRANDING

The Eagle has landed

The hottest American label, American Eagle setting up shop in India. And eyeing rapid expansion here



Radhakrishnan: upbeat about the brand's prospects



While visiting the US, if buying jeans is on your list, then a rather contemporary brand is surely on your radar. American Eagle Outfitters, Inc., founded in 1977, and growing exponentially in its home country, has now entered India in partnership with Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd.

"We felt that American Eagle (AE) is going to add great value to our international portfolio and will help us strengthen our position in the youth centric lifestyle space, giving our discerning customers a true taste of high-end fashion," says Sathyajit Radhakrishnan, president, International Business, Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd (ABFRL), which also has other international brands such as Forever 21, Ralph Lauren, Ted Baker, Simon Carter and Hackett London in its portfolio. "With the entry of American Eagle, we plan to fulfil the gap and garner a significant share of the country's premium jeans wear market."

Radhakrishnan is upbeat about the brand's prospects in the country,

despite rather fierce competition from other global brands, such as Levi's and Wrangler. "India has the fastest growing youth market in the world with upwardly mobile consumers, who are driving demand for brands having international aesthetics and style," he says. "However there seems to be a paucity of choices when it comes to jeans."

The brand truly believes in celebrating individuality and self-expression. Jeans are the heart of the brands business, with the highest quality and the most innovative range in fits and fashion. The brand believes that AE Jeans are the blank canvas for this self-expression, which truly go well with any look. Jeans are also the cornerstone of American Fashion & its optimistic youth culture, which enable AE to fulfil this promise in an authentic manner."

American Eagle is doing quite well in its home market. Notching up a turnover of \$3.8 billion in 2017, at a time when some competitors are scaling down. In a particularly challenging

global apparel market, American Eagle Outfitters has been one of the few lifestyle retailers which have consistently delivered record revenues year on year. "We can learn a lot from how AE has managed to maintain a very strong connection with the youth segment through innovative marketing efforts."

Seeking India's Gen Z

The brand is looking to scale up to 25 exclusive stores in India in the next three years in key retail destination markets and malls, informs Radhakrishnan. ABFRL has also invested in setting up and retailing American Eagle through the brand's exclusive India website www.aeo.in. It will also partner with all leading fashion online marketplaces such as Myntra and Amazon to reach the young population in smaller cities. Radhakrishnan estimates India's denim market, including unbranded, to be about ₹9,000 crore, growing at a CAGR of 13-14 per cent.

American Eagle is positioned as a fashionable youth lifestyle brand which will offer premium jeans wear to Indian youth, stresses Radhakrishnan. "It shall price its products in the premium band with a very competitive positioning. Each American Eagle store will have over 350 product options to choose from at any point in time. Our goal is to be amongst the top youth fashion brands in the country within the next five years." Jeans are priced from about ₹2,500 onwards online.

In a distinct shift, the brand plans to have digital and e-commerce to be a strong channel for the brand. "Given our digitally savvy target audience, we believe that we will see strong traction online and project that between 15-20 per cent of the business will come from this channel in the medium term," says Radhakrishnan. "The brand will focus on Gen Z, who are digital natives and stay connected 24x7. The brand would look to connect with them in their digital world while creating critical awareness for the brand in India in traditional mediums." Expect trendier millennials soon!

♦ SUMAN TARAFDAR
feedback@businessindiaingroup.com