

A Study on the Role of Celebrity Endorsers in Endorsing a Product Line

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Abstract

India is a country where people love to live in dreams. They worship celebrities. Celebrities, which might be cricket stars like Sachin Tendulkar, Mahinder Singh Dhoni or Film Stars like Shah Rukh Khan or John Ebrahim. They treat them as God. Marketers use this very preposition so as to influence their target customers may exist or potential ones. For this they rope in these celebrities and give them whopping amount of money. They believe that by doing this they can associate their products with their target customers. This is called celebrity endorsement. Aristotle said, “Beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction” This could aptly summarize why innumerable products are endorsed by celebrities, with or without a significant need or benefit from the same. Similarly, every product has an image. The consumer tries to consume a brand, which has the maximum fit with his/her own personality/image. The celebrity endorser fits in between these two interactions, where he tries to bring the image of the product closer to the expectation of the consumer, by transferring some of the cultural meanings residing in his image to the product. Now, despite the potential benefits derived from celebrity endorsements, they increase a marketer’s risk manifolds and should be treated with full attention and aptitude. A brand should be cautious when employing celebrities to ensure promise believability and delivery of the intended effect. The growing importance of mythical characters as celebrities and their sway over the target segments are ample proof of public demand for icons to look up to. As the celebrities traverse from a mere commercial presence to public welfare message endorsements, a whole new dimension is added to this process and helps us in achieving a holistic view of the impact which celebrities generate in every sphere and segment through their well-versed endorsements.

Keywords: Celebrity, Endorsement, Product, Brand, Customers

Introduction

Everyday consumers are exposed to thousands of voices and images in magazines, newspapers, and on billboards, websites, radio and television. Every brand attempts to steal at least a fraction of a person’s time to inform him or her of the amazing and different attributes of the product at hand. The challenge of the marketer is to find a hook that will hold the subject’s attention. In helping to achieve this, use of celebrity endorsers is a widely used marketing strategy.

In this modern age, people tend to ignore all commercials and advertisements while flipping through the magazines and newspapers or viewing TV. Even then, the glamour of a celebrity seldom goes unnoticed. Thus, celebrity endorsement in advertisement and its impact on the overall brand is of great significance. In this process, the companies hire celebrities from a particular field to feature in its advertisement campaigns. The promotional features and images of the product are matched with the celebrity image, which tends to persuade a consumer to fix up his choice from a variety of brands. Although this sounds pretty simple, but the design of such campaigns and the subsequent success in achieving the desired result calls for an in-depth understanding of the product, the brand objective, choice of a celebrity, associating the celebrity with the brand, and a framework for measuring the effectiveness. Companies invest large sums of money to align their brands and themselves with endorsers. Such endorsers are seen as dynamic with both attractive and likeable qualities and companies plan that these qualities are transferred to products via marcom activities.

Furthermore, because of their fame, celebrities serve to not only create and maintain attention but also to achieve high recall rates for marcom messages in today’s highly cluttered environments. Similarly, every product has an image. The consumer tries to consume a brand, which has the maximum fit with his/her own personality/image. The celebrity endorser fits in between these two interactions, where he

tries to bring the image of the product closer to the expectation of the consumer, by transferring some of the cultural meanings residing in his image to the product.

Rise of Celebrity Culture

The modern mass media has increased the exposure and power of celebrity. Often, celebrity carries with it immense social capitals that is highly sought after by some individuals. High paying jobs and other social perks unavailable to most people are readily available to celebrities, even for work not connected to the talents or accomplishment that made them famous. For example, A retired athlete might receive high “speaking fees or compensation for public appearances, despite his talent having been sports. Often, celebrities cannot escape the public eye & risk being followed by fans. As well, child celebrities are notorious for having poor emotional health in adulthood, and often turn to drug and alcohol abuse when their fame fades. In India today, the use of celebrity advertising for companies has become a trend and perceived winning formula of corporate image building and product marketing.

Associating a brand with a top-notch celebrity can do more than perk up brand recall. It can create linkages with the stars appeal, thereby adding refreshing and new dimensions to the brand image. In a world filled with faces, how many do you remember? Admittedly, the ones that evoke some kind of feel in you, whether it's humor, acceptance, appreciation or recognition. These are the faces you'd turn to look at, the ones that would stop you in your tracks. And that's when you have more than just a face. You have personality. “Personality that's reflective of your brand and promises to take it that extra mile”. As existing media get increasingly cluttered, the need to stand out has become paramount- and celebrities have proved to be the ideal way to ensure brand prominence. Synergizing personality with product and message can create an instant breakthrough. Result? Brand buzz. People begin to notice, opportunities come about. People want to be part of the brand. “Touch it. Feel it. Experience it.”

The Scope of a Celebrity on the Incumbent Brand

Simply stating, a brand is a differentiated product and helps in identifying your product and making it stand out due to its name, design, style, symbol, color combination, or usually a mix of all these: Before we can scrutinize the effects of celebrity endorsement on the overall brand, we have to ferret the implicit factors that act as sources of strong brand images or values:

- 1. Experience of Use:** This encapsulates familiarity and proven reliability.
- 2. User Associations:** Brands acquire images from the type of people who are seen using them. Images of prestige or success are imbibed when brands are associated with glamorous personalities.
- 3. Brand Appearance:** Design of brand offers clues to quality and affects preferences.
- 4. Manufacturer's Name & Reputation:** A prominent brand name (Sony, Kellogg's, Bajaj, Tata) transfers positive associations. The celebrity's role is the most explicit and profound in incarnating user associations among the above mentioned points. To comprehend this, let us analyze the multiplier effect formula for a successful brand: -

$$S = E * D * AV \text{-- the multiplier effect}$$

Where

S is a Successful Brand

E is an Effective Product

D is Distinctive Identity

AV is Added Values

The realm of the celebrity's impact is confined to bestow a distinctive identity and provide AV to the brand; the celebrity does not have the power to improve or debilitate the efficiency and features of the core product. Thus, we are gradually approaching an evident proposition claiming, "The health of a brand can definitely be improved up to some extent by celebrity endorsement. But one has to remember that endorsing a celebrity is a means to an end and not an end in itself."

An appropriately used celebrity can prove to be a massively powerful tool that magnifies the effects of a campaign. However, the aura of cautiousness should always be there. The fact to be emphasized is

that celebrities alone do not guarantee success, as consumers nowadays understand advertising, know what advertising is, and how it works. People realize that celebrities are being paid a lot of money for endorsements and this knowledge leads them to think twice about celebrity endorsements.

In its third year, the 2014 Forbes India Celebrity 100 list found a new leader. Shah Rukh Khan, who was a clear No. 1 in the previous two editions, has dropped to the third rung. He has been replaced at the top by Salman Khan. The No. 2 slot is now occupied by Bollywood's enduring star Amitabh Bachchan, who is up from the fifth position last year.

Reason for this shuffle: Shah Rukh Khan did not have a release within our period of consideration (October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014). Meanwhile, Salman Khan had two hits—Jai Ho and Kick and substantial earnings as host of reality show Bigg Boss on Colors TV (owned by Network 18, publisher of Forbes India). Amitabh Bachchan, too, drew sizeable earnings from his TV shows Kaun Banega Crorepati and Yudh apart from brand endorsements.

This is also the first time in the three-year run of the List that the overall No. 1 heads the earnings and the fame charts. However, despite a quiet year, Shah Rukh Khan has only slipped to No. 3.

This can be attributed to his undiminished brand value that has earned him about Rs 202 crore (the highest through endorsements). With 22 deals, his is also the highest number of brands endorsed by a celebrity. However, on the fame count, he could only garner a No. 7 as opposed to the top slot last year.

Fame, in fact, proved to be a surprise factor this year. Take actor Preity Zinta, for instance, who makes an entry at No. 14 on the back of her fame count, which far outweighs her earnings. Her film career, however, had no role to play in this. It was her spat with Ness Wadia, the co-owner of IPL's King's XI Punjab, and the strong performance of the team that attracted strong media coverage.

Other notable newcomers this year include singer Arijit Singh, cricketer Ajinkya Rahane and actors from Bollywood and the South: Arjun Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Rajinikanth and his son-in-law Dhanush are among the 20 debutants; 10—among them Sunny Leone, MC Mary Kom, Kangana Ranaut and Imtiaz Ali—are returnees.

Snakes And Ladders

TV comedian Kapil Sharma has made the biggest climb this year: He's up 60 places to 33 as his show Comedy Nights with Kapil continues to enthrall audiences. Singers Yo Yo Honey Singh and Mika Singh too have made significant progress to Nos. 16 and 40, from their earlier slots of 59 and 74, respectively. The major absentees from the list include music director Pritam; he was ranked 29 last year. The others who could not retain their places include Emraan Hashmi (43 last year), Amit Trivedi (64), Sajid Khan (76) and Jeev Milkha Singh (87): In all, there are 30 dropouts.

The celebrity list reflects the enhancement of womanpower in the Indian entertainment industry led, of course, by Bollywood. There are now 28 women compared to 21 last year. Of these, five are returnees and five debutants. Women celebrities also outdid the men on airtime bought for TV commercials. The first three slots among endorsers are occupied by Kareena Kapoor Khan, Deepika Padukone and Katrina Kaif.

IT'S a Social World

Celebrities in India seem to have embraced social media as the quickest and, often, most effective marketing tool. For free. Some actors have used it to release their new movie's first look and ensured a committed audience before its release. Others, like comedian Papa CJ, bring in packed houses for their shows by communicating the time and date for their next performance. However, few use social media as well as Amitabh Bachchan. With 11.8 million followers on Twitter and counting, the window with his fans is always open and responsive. Just another pointer to his unfailing (and amazingly, growing) popularity—a lesson the younger guns would do well to learn. The Celeb 100 List compiled by Cuckoo Paul, Debojyoti Ghosh, Deepak Ajwani, Deepti Chaudhary, Kathakali Chanda, Kunal Purandare, Pravin Palande, Salil Panchal, Samar Srivastava, Shabana Hussain, Shravan Bhat & Sohini Mitter.

From Celebrity Endorsers to True Ambassadorship in India

The heroes of Bollywood and cricket have typically dominated celebrity endorsement of brands in India. Signing up a leading man from the film industry, such as Shahrukh Khan, or a cricketing legend like Sachin Tendulkar provided a quick-fire way to mass awareness and credibility in a nation obsessed with both pastimes. However, as India's consumers become increasingly prosperous and discerning, deployment of the 'one size fits all' celebrity is reaching its saturation point. The portfolio of brands endorsed by megastars is so wide that it largely dilutes a specific association with the brand. Last year Khan alone endorsed 25 different brands, ranging from home décor to skin-lightening creams and luxury products.

Subsequently brands in India are looking to develop distinct brand personalities and more meaningful engagements with celebrities – signaling a move from celebrity endorsement to genuine ambassadorship. The increasing diversification of domestic film to address modern urban audiences has created a new generation of stars. Young film talents, unlike their predecessors, have developed more consistent media profiles due to their casting in new Bollywood genres such as modern romantic comedies. A new generation of actresses, including Sonam Kapoor, Deepika Padukone and Genelia D'Souza, have become representative of the modern and international lifestyle of the growing urban middle class. Kapoor, for example, has proven particularly attractive to brands due to her reputation as a style icon. She has become the face of L'Oreal and Electrolux, represented by both brands as a busy, modern, international woman to help the companies provide guidance and build intimacy with aspiring young women.

Similarly, Padukone and D'Souza – both popular for their cheeky attitude to traditional romance – have been used by Nescafe and Fast Track (Titan's youth brand in India) to communicate a fresh and irrelevant attitude defining India's Generation X. For Nescafe, Padukone portrays a woman in control, comically leaving male pursuers in her wake as she calmly sips her regular Cuppa. D'Souza portrays a similar attitude in an advert for Fast Track when she decides to check-in her boyfriend at the airport as baggage – metaphorically answering the company's brand slogan 'Move on'.

Another emerging approach to celebrity is focusing on a specific aspect of the personalities and lifestyles of established stars. Aamir Khan, who established himself as a heartthrob hero during the 1990s, has more recently produced and starred in a series of innovative hits that have served to redefine Bollywood as a genre. His new reputation as an auteur has proven a powerful complement to Samsung's series of new handsets, including the local Samsung Hero. Khan deliberately pokes fun at the typecast of a Bollywood hero to highlight the phone's new features – including a frank assessment with fans that the phone is the true hero.

Another example of a former star being recast to promote brands is Kajol, a leading film star who famously cut her career short to raise a family. As the face of Unilever's Knorr soup, Kajol became the spokeswoman for the slogan 'Tummy bhi khush, Mummy bhi khush' (If your tummy is happy, so is mummy). Using Kajol's media image as a dedicated and modern mother, Knorr had the credibility to introduce a new occasion to urban Indian households – the idea of 7pm soup, a nutritional snack for children before their main evening meal.

Celebrities are also working harder for brands by lending their creativity, and not just their image. Local automaker Mahindra launched their multi-utility vehicle Xylo alongside fashion photographer Atul Kasbekar, well known for his Kingfisher swimsuit calendars. His creative lifestyle was seen as a strong match with the escape and flexibility offered by the new vehicle. Mahindra's decision to go with Kasbekar represented a desire for the brand's vehicle launch not to be washed out by the ubiquity of a major celebrity.

Similarly, motorcycle producer Hero Motor Corp redefined the role of celebrity with its 'Hero within us' campaign. The original TVC, headlined by a composition by legendary musician A.R.Rahman, was expanded to a Facebook and online campaign asking people to upload videos with their karaoke versions of Rahman's anthem. In a first of its kind, the celebrity involvement shifts from an idolised legend to a positive enabler and mentor – a relationship that mirrors the ambition of the motorcycle producer to facilitate dreams.

The shift in brands' use of celebrity has been highlighted by Birla Sun Life's controversial campaign featuring cancer sufferer Yuvraj Singh. Singh, a virile symbol of Indian cricket with his standout performances in India's home World Cup victory last year, was recently diagnosed with a rare form of cell cancer and currently recovering from chemotherapy in the US. The TVC, shot before Singh was diagnosed, has subsequently been rewritten with the cricketer's permission to reference his current medical situation – representing an unconventionally personal portrayal of a celebrity, and arguably a very powerful communication by the life insurance brand.

Brands now seem determined to ensure celebrities are extending the brand story, rather than simply providing star appeal. In the clutter of India's morphing mediascape, the need to avoid the stereotypical and deliver the substantial is leading to new brand relationships with celebrities – a move from endorsement to true brand ambassadorship.

Role of Celebrities in Advertising

With an aim to understand roles for and the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements as a marketing tactic, the second edition of 'Food for Thought' series explores celebrity Sensor to understand how consumers react to brand associations with celebrities. The findings of its latest celebrity Sensor report was released by Mediaedge:cia's (MEC) consumer insight and ROI division, MEC MediaLab.

The study highlights that 32 per cent consumers say that celebrity endorsement influence their purchasing decision. What is also interesting to note is that over 75 per cent consumers believe that too many products are being promoted by celebrities in India. The research also shows that celebrity endorsement still plays an important role in generating brand salience and positively affecting the brand image. In fact, 57 per cent believe that celebrity endorsement makes a brand stand out, while 62 per cent agree that it enhances a brand's personality.

Another interesting finding is that celebrity role in advertising is complex as they do not appear to build brand trust or belief in product efficacy and nor does it encourage word of mouth. Only 35 per cent of consumers feel a celebrity helps them to trust a product, while 32 per cent believe that a celebrity actually helps them believe that a product actually works and only 31 per cent say that a celebrity makes them want to recommend a brand. The research also highlights the risks for brands that use popular celebrities with broad appeal as 42 per cent of people find it hard to believe which celebrity promotes which product, and this figure jumps to 66 per cent for celebrities who endorse more than one brand.

The celebrity sensor research was conducted over 1,000 adults of urban India, which concentrated on the bigger cities and towns. The sample has been based on the company's global guidelines for celeb sensor studies. This study was also conducted across 25 countries worldwide.

The Highlights

In conversation with exchange4media, Shubha George, COO, MEC, said, "Conventional belief is that India has a greater celebrity culture, but we found the India results in line with other countries. However, this level of interest is generated by a smaller set of celebrities, essentially film stars and cricketers. While there may be specific stars that have overwhelming fan following, at a broad level, interest levels in celebrities are similar across the country. While majority of Indians prefer local celebrities, there is a strong 40 per cent who would like to see international celebrities endorsing brands."

She further said, "Celebrities work better for some product categories compared to others, for instance mobile phones, beauty and fragrance, luxury goods and cars. Only around a third of consumers trust brands more, or believes that a brand is efficacious because a celebrity is endorsing it. The biggest area of influence of a celebrity endorsement is that it increases the brand's salience significantly and adds to its imagery. Also, there is peer recommendation and word of mouth generated by celebrity endorsed products."

On youth influence and the challenges for marketers over celebrity endorsements in India, she observed, "Surprisingly, interest in celebrity's vis-à-vis brand associations among youth is similar to the rest of the population. Older age groups (above 45 years) is slightly lower, but the rest are quite

matched. Consumers find multiple endorsements by the same celebrities confusing and agree that they have difficulty in remembering who endorses what. This is the single most important challenge for marketers and agency professionals, because multiple endorsements are a reality and if the endorsement is not managed well, there is a real danger of it passing by. That would indeed be a waste of millions of endorsement and advertising monies.”

Six Pointers for Marketers

MEC also provided six pointers for brands evaluating celebrity endorsements, the first one being the importance of picking the right celebrity and have a long-term strategy on how to use them. Secondly, have a powerful central thought that strongly binds the brand and celebrity and uses the celebrity beyond his or her recognizable face.

Third, avoid the danger of casting the celebrity as a screen ‘avatar’ for instance, having Hrithik Roshan dance in all commercials reduces brand recall.

Four, beauty brands beware of beautiful faces: just a pretty face causes confusion in consumers mind as when these celebrities are used without any differentiation to the brand consumers tend to replace one beauty with another in their mind.

Fifth, multiple celebrities for a single brand dilute the association and fragments recall and finally, under investing in media kills the association without even an opportunity to test the strength of the association and to be effective, celebrity endorsements must be used as an overall communication strategy and not standalone

Conclusion

Without endorsers, the product is lifeless and faceless. However, when endorsers become the advertising techniques used in introducing the product, then said product has brought to life. Moreover, if businesses use the face of famous celebrities, then the product has an instant fame and profits are expected to skyrocket. The brand is projected to be living and credible with the presence of celebrities. Analysts believe that famous celebrities are more capable catching the attention of consumers. In addition to that, brands being established by celebrities are more likely to retain longer on consumer’s memory. Conversely, the brands are easily recalled with a mere mention of a product. If the advertisers lack ideas on how to promote a brand with products that have many competitors, they use popular celebrities to optimize the brand image and to grant it instant credibility or PR coverage. This principle particularly holds true if the celebrity has ascending popularity or career.

Many businesses capitalize on such fame by selling a part of that dream. They project an attractive image with hidden message that if consumers patronize their products, they are likely to be leveled with celebrities; that they can also share and live up the dream and success. This is among the principle of creative advertising techniques. Celebrities are good at facilitating the advertising techniques that businesses desire to implement. They are efficient at connecting to the consumers. They can reach out to the consumers in whatever manner the endorsers have strong impact in. Some experts call it a power to connect with the consuming public. If the ideal star is employed to represent the product, his strong appeal can send a brand message without further statement. Billboards are best and effective when photos of popular celebrities grace them. There is no need for them to speak. Their image did it, and the statement is compelling. When it comes to highlighting features of a product, there is no better promoter than a superstar. This is regardless of the reputation of the brand. If the brand is already reputable, then its reputation is further enhanced. On the other hand, if the brand is new, it is given help in establishing its reputation by the famous endorser. This is also similar with movie superstars and performing artists. Their talent is appealing to their fans that fan themselves imitate and idolize them. They pattern their lifestyle after theirs, including the places, they frequent and the brands they personally use. Hence, they are excellent carriers of brand names.

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