

₹ 200

ISSN - 2249-555X

Volume : 1

Issue : 9

June 2012



Journal for All Subjects

[www.ijar.in](http://www.ijar.in)

Listed in International ISSN Directory, Paris.



ISSN - 2249-555X

# Indian Journal of Applied Research

## Journal for All Subjects

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## Celebrity Endorsement in India An Effective Tool of Sales Promotion

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### ABSTRACT

*The field of consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of product, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society. And understanding the consumer behavior is the prime and toughest task in front of every marketer. There are a lot of factors, which influence consumer buyer behavior. This study aimed at to understand the "influence of celebrity endorsee on consumer buying behavior and marketing." With reference to Indian market.*

*In influencing consumer preferences to buy the products of a particular business firm the businessmen have been using the celebrities from film and Television industry, sports personalities over a long time, however in recent years it has proliferated. Today no business firms think of popularizing its product among the consumers without such advertisements. Despite this practice being costly and at the same time risky still business firms prefer this mode of advertisement.*

*Being a culturally diverse and socially versatile Indian society is heavily influenced by the bollywood stars and cricketers who are idealized in shaping the preference of Indian consumers, be young male or female or old persons. The present research paper examines the perception of the Indian Consumers in arriving at their decisions of purchases based on the celebrity endorsement.*

**Keywords : celebrity endorsement, consumer preferences, advertisement, branding**

### Introduction

Marketers spend enormous amounts of money annually on celebrity endorsement contracts based on the belief that celebrities are effective spokespeople for their products or brands. Celebrity endorsement is viewed as a billion dollar industry today. Various companies are signing deals with celebrities in the hope that by using celebrities they can accomplish a unique and relevant position in the minds of the consumers. Celebrity endorsement is increasingly being employed across various industries regardless of the product type. It is known to be playing the role of a signaling strategy accordingly as such the celebrity endorsement can give a brand a touch of glamour.

One have to weigh the potential risks versus the potential rewards as celebrity endorsements are always a high-risk, high-reward situation and there is always a human element that you might not know about it.

The topic of celebrity endorsements and its elements is heavily documented in academic literature, but what makes this research interesting is that it enables us to understand the celebrity endorsement process from an Indian consumers point of view. Not much work has been done in India despite the fact of it being perceived as a potential market for celebrity endorsed products.

Indian consumer attitudes are changing at a rapid pace and they are becoming more aware of the products that they use to define their 'self'. The present research is carried out to obtain a view amongst Indian consumers about celebrity endorsement. Is it as positive as it is assumed to be?

Most advertisements, be it of any form, majorly focuses on the young generation therefore their perception about the celebrity endorsed form of advertisement is of utmost importance, also getting to know the attitude the youth provides the

knowledge of the most current incidents or attitudes of any country, hence the youth has been targeted in this research.

The research of the present work is centered on the question how does celebrity endorsement impact the perception of Indian consumers and how does it impact their buying behaviour?

### Literature Review

According to Indian market is not by a large space, an easy audience to target for the advertisers. The one billion people of the country are speckled in terms of beliefs, ethnicity, states, culture, language, dialects, norms and values. Other aspects such as the economic discrepancy in the country separates it in a way which has resulted in a large number of lower and upper middle class, with a very small class falling under in the middle class. This demonstrates a vast disparity in the buying power and decision making clout, one which the advertisers should keep in mind. Indian advertisement has been placing a vital amount of importance on both recall and persuasion as brand differentiating messages. (Dixit, 2005). Very often, various advertising styles are used by advertisers to influence consumer brand choice behaviour and among these different available choices one very popular choice is celebrity endorsements. (Alsmadi 2006).

Traditional celebrity endorsements are as well established as the concept of celebrity itself. Celebrities influence on consumers appears to be larger than ever before. When used effectively celebrity endorsers have the potential of serving a valuable role in enhancing a brand's competitive position and developing brand equity. (Till 1998). Schikel (1985) highlights the subtle yet intense impact of celebrities on everyday thinking and living. Defined as 'intimacy at a distance', it is seen that individuals have a tendency to form illusions of an interpersonal relationship with celebrities. (Horton & Wohl 1956).

A person who enjoys public recognition from a large share of a certain group of people and uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in advertisements is known as a celebrity. (McCraken 1989). They are usually known to the public for their accomplishments in areas other than the product endorsed by them. Friedman & Friedman (1979). This stands true for classic forms of celebrities such as actors like Amitabh Bachan, models like Milan Somen, Sports personalities like Sachin Tendulkar and entertainers like Vidya Balan, Madhuri Dixit or Aishwarya Rai Bachan but also for less obvious groups such as businessmen like the Anil and Mukesh Ambani or politicians like Rahul Gandhi. (Schlecht 2003).

In India especially, it is not difficult to find motives for the increasing use of celebrities in advertisements as Indians have always been in awe of the stars of the celluloid world. Unlike the foreign counterparts they have always consecrated them and placed a halo behind their heads implying that their celebrities could do no wrong. Indeed, some people are seen to admire, imitate, and become besotted with their favorite celebrities, which forms the crux for the celebrity endorsement being quite a sought after advertisement technique.

Today celebrity endorsement is being seen more and more as an integral part of an integrated marketing communication strategy. Hamish and Pringle (2004) suggest 3 macro factors present in the market today that in principal justifies the validity of celebrity endorsement as a promotional strategy. firstly the increasing opportunity for interactivity between brands and their consumers. Secondly in the "era of consent" situation present today where consumers have more control over the messages they receive. And lastly is the increasing media fragmentation and commercial communication clutter. (Temperley and Tangen, 2006). Pappas (1999) examined the value of star power in an endorsement and pointed towards how a well-designed advertising helped celebrities convert their star power into brand equity.

From a theoretical perspective, celebrities are considered to be effective endorsers as because of the presence of their symbolic desirable reference group alliance. (Soloman and Assael, 1987). Assael (1984) suggests that the effectiveness of the celebrity endorsement is present because of its ability to tap into the consumer's symbolic union with its inspirational reference group.

Reference groups among consumers are viewed as being a critical source of brand meanings as it helps them to evaluate their believe about the world particularly with others who share the same beliefs or are similar on relevant dimensions. Consumers form associations between reference groups and the brands they use and transfer this meaning from brand to self and one of the most reliable form of reference group is celebrity endorsers. (Escalas and Bettman 2005)

#### **Celebrity versus Non-celebrity endorsement effectiveness**

According to Tom et al (1992) results endorsers were more effective in creating a link to the product than celebrity endorsers based on the classical conditioning paradigm. This argument was based on the fact that companies had more controlling power over created endorsers and they build these characters in such a manner that they are fitting with the brand and target audience and also that these characters were not allowed to endorse more than one brand. The celebrity endorsers on the other hand had created a persona of their own over time and the company lacked control over them.

Differences were found in the cognitive responses, but there was no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards advertising and the intention to purchase the endorsed brand in the celebrity and non-celebrity endorsed situations. (Mehta 1994). On the contrary Atkin, Charles and Block 1983 found that as compared to the non-celebrity endorsers, the celebrity endorsers produced more positive attitudes towards advertising and greater purchase intentions.

McCraken (1989) found that the use of celebrity endorsers stand for an effective way of transferring meaning to brands as it is believed that celebrity endorsers bring their own emblematic meaning to the endorsement process and that this cultural meaning residing in the celebrity is passed on to the product which in turn is passed on to the consumer. McCraken (1989) argued there lays a difference between celebrities and anonymous person as it is assumed by him that celebrities have the capability of delivering meanings of extra depth, power and subtlety and also offers a range of lifestyle and personality which cannot be matched by anonymous people. In the similar vein he continues to prove that most heavily stereotyped celebrity produces not just single meanings but also interconnected multiple meanings indicating that celebrity endorsers are far more effective than non-celebrity endorsers. In the light of company reports and academic writing it is safe to argue that celebrity endorsers are more effective than non celebrity endorsers in generating desirable income. (Erdogan & Baker 1999).

#### **Pros of Celebrity Advertisement**

Academic researchers have conducted sufficient empirical research to express the benefits of product endorsement, in addition to the intuitive arguments that rationalize this practice. It is observed that the presence of a renowned persona helps in solving the problem of over communication that is becoming more and more prevalent these days. (Kulkarni, A. Sanyukta & Gaulkar, U Sahir 2005)

The increased consumer power over programmed advertisement has made advertising more challenging. To ease this threat and to help create and maintain consumer attention to advertisements celebrity endorsement strategy is seen to be advantageous. Celebrities have the potential of helping the advertisements stand out from the surrounding clutter, guiding towards a improved communicative ability by cutting through excess noise in a communication process (Sherman 1985). Also one probable solution in the face of tarnished company image is the hiring of a celebrity to restore it. Celebrity Endorsement assists in the image polishing of the company's image. (Erdogan, & Baker 1999)

A stream of studies identifies the attributes such trustworthiness, similarity, likableness, expertise that cause a celebrity to stand as a persuasive source which in turn creates a sense of certainty. (Mustafa 2005). It is shown by research and experience that consumers are highly ready to spend and more comfortable, when products that relate to their desired image is endorsed by celebrities. (Internet World 2001) as it helps them to take more notice of celebrity endorsements and improve their level of product recall. (Bowman 2002)

Another reason for the use of celebrity endorsement is because it has a strong impact on the learning style and memory which is critical to marketing communication success. This is because most consumers are not in a purchasing situation when they come into contact with the brand message. Marketers make use of celebrity endorsements as they lead to better information storage in the minds of the consumers which can be readily retrieved when the purchasing situation dose arise. (Schultz & Barnes, 1995)

#### **Cons of Celebrity Endorsement**

The very first downside of celebrity endorsement is the term 'Lazy Advertising' used to address the extreme usage of celebrities to endorse products, which poses a question on the validation of success of celebrity endorsement as a prevalent marketing communication activity. (Kulkarni, A. Sanyukta & Gaulkar, U Sahir 2005). It is believed that using celebrities can turn out to be an unnecessary risk, unless there appears to be a very logical relation between the endorser and the product. (Beverage Industry 1989, USA Today, 1995) Celebrity endorsers may now and then become a liability to the brand they endorse (Till and Shimp, 1998). Negative information and publicity regarding the celebrity is one risk associated with the use of celebrity endorsers. If the celebrity is strongly associ-

ated with the brand then the impact of the negative publicity will brim over to the product. (Till, 1998). Many companies have been badly affected by the negative publicity accruing from the celebrity's misdeeds. One very prominent example is Pepsi which suffered with three tarnished celebrities - Mike Tyson, Madonna, and Michael Jackson. (Katy, 2007). Furthermore, those who chooses to use celebrities have no control over the celebrity's future behaviour.(Till & Shimp, 1998)

Clutter in brand endorsement is very high up these days. (Kulkarni ,A.Sanyukta & Gaulkar,U Sahir 2005). This is due to celebrity greed which leads to a celebrity endorsing many diverse products. (Erdogan, 1999) Overexposure is a common occurrence between highly recognized and well-liked endorsers and highly competing brands and leads to making the consumer confused and unable to recall correctly which brand the celebrity stands for.

Two new shortcomings can be seen these days what marketers call Celebrity Trap and Celebrity Credibility. Celebrity trap is when the task to find substitutes becomes more and more difficult and thus celebrity becomes an addiction for the marketing team leading to surfeit of celebrities. Celebrity credibility refers to skepticism by the consumers regarding the celebrities, because of which brand is bound to be affected, especially when there is anything negative regarding the celebrity associated with the brand in the news. (Kulkarni ,A.Sanyukta & Gaulkar,U Sahir 2005) .

Agrawal and Kamakura (1995) recommend that there are decreasing returns associated with celebrities in advertising. Also some consumers have termed celebrities to be a 'puppet' used by companies implying that they perceive the celebrities to be lying, when endorsing certain products. (Temperley & Tangen, 2006)

#### Consumer's perspective

"The heterogeneity in consumer's responses to emotional appeals in advertising is well documented in the behavioural literature".(Moore, Harris & Chen, 1995).McCraken (1989) goes on to describe a consumer as a 'self' that constantly detracts into their lives the symbolic properties from consumer products in order to construct aspects of themselves and the world. The results of the study conducted by O'Mahony and Meenaghan (1998) designate that a consumer holds by and large a positive attitude towards celebrity endorsements. Research confirms that the celebrity endorsement can have an impact on the consumers recall evaluations, attention and purchase intentions. At the same time it needs to be taken into consideration that although consumers might have a favourable disposition towards celebrities, this does not necessarily always translates into purchase intentions. O'Mahony and Meenaghan, (1998).

#### Some Global Examples:

Globally, firms have been juxtaposing their brands and themselves with celebrity endorsers. Some successful ongoing global endorsements are as follows:

- Celebrity endorsements have been the bedrock of Pepsi's advertising. including Shaquille O'Neal, Mary J. Blige, Wyclef Jean, and Busta Rhymes, who did a targeted campaign for their Mountain Dew product.
- George Foreman for Meineke. He has also sold more than 10 million Lean Mean Fat-- Reducing Grilling Machines since signing with the manufacturing company.
- James Earl Jones for Verizon and CNN.
- Other successful endorsements like Nike—Michael Jordan, Dunlop—John McEnroe, Adidas—Prince Naseem Hamed, and so on.
- Venus Williams, tennis player and Wimbledon champion has signed a five-year \$40 million contract with sportswear manufacturer Reebok International.

#### Some Indian Examples:

Some of the Indian celebrities and sportsman are endorsing/

branding lot of products. Some successful ongoing Indian endorsements are as follows:

- Celebrity endorsements have been the bedrock of Pepsi's advertising. Over the years, Pepsi has used and continues to use a number of celebrities for general market and targeted advertising, including Sachin tendulkar , Sharukh Khan and Amitabh Bacchan and are using brand advocacy.
- Sachin tendulkar is branding - Adidas, TVS, Britannia , MRF tyres and ESPN Channel.
- Amitabh Bacchan one of the legend in film industry is endorsing brands like -ICICI bank, Cadbury, Dabur, Reid and Taylor .
- Sharukh Khan is endorsing brands like – Santro ,HLL , Videocon , Tata sky .
- Other successful endorsements like Boost – Virendra Sehwaq, Asian Paints – Saif ali Khan , Castrol – Rahul Dravid , Hero Honda – M.S.Dhoni ,Titan – Aamir Khan and so on .
- Aishwarya Rai Bacchan is endorsing brands like – Nakshatra , Lóreal, Lux, Longines Watches.
- Preeti Zinta for Cadbury, Godrej ,TVS Scooty, Maggi , Head & Shoulder shapoo.

#### Country context: India

Brand endorsements by celebrities are a widespread phenomenon in India and worldwide. For decades, the celebrities present in the Indian films have provided lifestyle cues to youth. Given the popularity, size and reach of the celebrities present in the film industry have the power to influence the attitude and behavior of millions of people, particularly the youth in India. The result of several discussions between strategic media work and WHO, after consulting with media experts, sociologists, films and television professionals and academics as well as scanned media reports, determines the impact of films and its consequent impact of celebrities on the youth.

The country observed for the first time aggressive competition between new players and big established businesses with the opening of the new Indian economy in 1991.(Malhotra 2005).

Consumer's expectations and demands are continuously rising in today's dynamic and competitive environment forcing marketers to adopt more creative advertising efforts such as celebrity endorsements to influence consumer brand choice and behaviour. (Alsmadi 2006). Hence, there was a novelty of the celebrity brand endorsement which has proliferated to have become a multi-million dollar industry in India today. (Malhotra 2005)

Further more the celebrities in India live a very public life, hence several aspects of their lives are exposed to the general public such as where they shop, where they holiday, their favorite food and so on and thus receives extensive coverage from the media. The best example to support this is the South Indian actor Rajnikanth who has temples dedicated to his glory.(Dixit 2005)

However, a few of the brands have, no doubt, been established without celebrity endorsement (Kulkarni ,A.Sanyukta & Gaulkar,U Sahir 2005). Procter & Gamble promoted its 'Re-joyce' brand in India with an ordinary woman in their advertising which worked well. They do not believe in celebrity endorsement and think that consumers, especially housewives, are more prone to identify with a lay person than a celebrity. A few more examples that can be given are Lifebuoy, Close Up, Fevicol etc.

Katy (2007) asserts that there is the presence of great po-

tential for celebrity endorsement in India to be seen as truly relevant, thereby inducing customer to purchase the product. He also states that star power in India can be identified by the successful endorsements done by Shah Rukh Khan for three brands namely Santro, Clinic All-clear and Pepsi.

### Research Design

In context to the research topic of this study, a qualitative method of enquiry is justified as the views on the perception of the Indian consumers about celebrity endorsement are highly subjective and difficult to measure by the researcher. The use of qualitative research mode facilitates an interpretive study of a particular issue where the researcher is central to deriving logic of the responses received from the respondents (Silverman, 2000), which is different from quantitative research where the role of the researcher is to take an isolated stand. (Duffy, 1988). A qualitative researcher is more involved with the truth as perceived by the respondent rather than the objective truth. (Burns, 2000)

### Data collection

Sources of Data

#### Primary data

Primary data is generally originated by any researcher to address any specific problem or issue at hand, where the only drawback is that it can be expensive and time-consuming. The various ways of gathering primary data is through surveys, focus group, pilot test, observations and interviews.

#### Secondary Data

Prerequisite to the collection of primary data is a careful scrutiny of the existing secondary data. (Malhotra, 2005) Data that is collected from existing journals, reports, statistics from private and public institutions. For this specific study the collection of secondary data was done primarily from marketing journals already available on this topic. Secondary data helps the author to comprehend the perception of Indian consumers on celebrity endorsement better.

#### Sampling Strategy

The process of sampling constitutes one of the principal areas of confusion, a problem not helped by the insufficient manner in which it is covered in the literature. (Marshall, 1996). There are no clear cut rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry therefore its determinant depends on what researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what will have credibility, what's at stake, what will be useful, and what can be done with the available time and resources. (Sobal, 2001) Thus, choosing a study sample is an important step in any research project since it is rarely efficient, practical, or ethical to study whole populations.

#### Result of the study

The present research is trying to attempt to document use on celebrity endorsement from consumers especially youth across age and sex, we have taken a sample of 100 youth in age group of 20 – 30 years of age in Jaipur city between August to December 2011. The sample group included even no. of male and female consumers, A majority of selected person were college going students, nearly 70 % were college going and rest 30% were either in service or businessmen / women.

A comprehensive questionnaire was supplied to them to answer on the pertinent questions relating to their consumption preferences and influence carried by celebrity endorsement on their purchase decisions. It was also questioned whether celebrity endorsement or theme based advertisement attract them most. It is interesting to note that although a majority (70%) of respondents us an affirmative to celebrity endorsement. However 30% of the respondents were of opinion that the theme based advertisement like –VODAFONE Jojo Character attract them most. These college going students both male and female are as expected always, swayed away by the advertisement given by film stars It is noted that among male students Amitabh bachan (65%) attracted them the

most, followed by Sharukh Khan (55%) while the cricket tycoon Sachin Tendulkar also attracts consumers significantly equal to Sharukh Khan.

Further more Amitabh Bacchan is equally popular in both male / female. It was also found (through newspapers / other sources) those companies which were roping in Amitabh Bacchan for advertising of their products abstract them to be benefited the most.

Since the Indian youth are overwhelming (in some cases extent of obsession) influenced by the film stars, it is their habit of watching the movies of these stars not once but many times which shows their commitment to the celebrity and this influence their consumption decisions. It was found relatively that less popular celebrity endorsement cricketers might do not influence the decision of consumers.

Among the female celebrity endorsement Aishwarya Rai Bacchan (80%) is the most popular among youth followed by Preity Zinta (55%). These female Celebrity endorsers only advertise in beauty related products – lux soap, Pantene shampoo and olay cream.

The most female celebrities go for advertisement of FMCG products, while male celebrity endorsement do advertise several products related to FMCG as well as consumer durables.

The result of this study is that a consumer holds by and large a positive attitude towards celebrity endorsements. Research confirms that the celebrity endorsement can have an impact on the consumers recall evaluations, attention and purchase intentions. At the same time it needs to be taken into consideration that although consumers might have a favorable disposition towards celebrities, this does not necessarily always translates into purchase intentions.

### Conclusions

"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." Till, B D (1998)

Celebrity endorsement is truly a multifaceted and debatable research topic. After mulling over the analysis it is evident that all the participants were very much aware of the fashion of celebrity endorsing products. There appeared to be a clear demarcation between consumers, one being the 'celebrity enthusiast' and the product enthusiast'. It was observed that even though celebrity endorsement as a marketing communication activity is viewed in a positive light since the consumers used terms like 'glamorous' and 'eye catching' to define it, the general view relating to opting for celebrity endorsed product as a personal choice was pessimistic. During the interviews, participants had articulated that in India the 'middle and the lower class' people were the ones for whom celebrity endorsement was of value in terms of their purchase decision, but it's not meant for them.

The results obtained in respect of multiple celebrity endorsements were quite unanticipated. The respondents showed tolerance towards this aspect of celebrity endorsement with the condition that same celebrity refrains from endorsing product from the same category. In the case of brand recall, respondents agree that the existence of celebrities does help in recalling the product faster and in some cases also leads to consumers going ahead and purchasing the goods. But in most of the incidences it does not result in inducing a purchase.

Despite the obvious economic advantage of using relatively unknown personalities as endorsers in advertising campaigns, the choice of celebrities to fulfill that role has become common practice for brands competing in today's cluttered media environment. There are several reasons for such extensive use of celebrities. Because of their high profile,

celebrities may help advertisements stand out from the surrounding clutter, thus improving their communicative ability. Celebrities may also generate extensive Public relation leverage for brands. But would be presumptuous to consider celebrity endorsement as a panacea for all barricades. Celebrity endorsement if used effectively, makes the brand stand out, galvanizes brand recall and facilitates instant awareness.

To achieve this, the marketer needs to be really disciplined in choice of a celebrity. Hence the right use of celebrity can escalate the Unique Selling Proposition of a brand to new heights; but a cursory orientation of a celebrity with a brand may prove to be claustrophobic for the brand. A celebrity is a means to an end, and not an end in himself/herself.

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