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CELEBRITOLOGY: Application of Neuromarketing in Celebrity Endorsement Studies

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Celebrity images and lifestyles have been important endorsement instruments in marketing strategies which are often effectively employed to influence the public, especially the young minds with relatively delicate neuroception of ideas and habits. Adolescent socialization and admiration of celebrities and a weakened attachment to a rather chaotic family environment have replaced the advice and experience of other credible sources. The glamorous celebrity aura is successfully exploited in marketing as well as political and social campaigns.

When a consumer looks at a celebrity endorsed product, in an unconscious manner it becomes part of his thinking mode. The preference for the product is internally processed, sense based or it may be derived from some feedback coming from others' ideas. People with a conscious nature and directly perceptible minds would tend to use logic and information to arrive at their final choices. Often such customers welcome any new ideas they find in a product. However, in all the cases the conscious and the unconscious aspects are not in watertight compartments in a consumer's mind provided the improvements in the product are not visibly superfluous. The intention of the marketer should be to offer a value based customer friendly product without any major or sudden structural change in it.

Marketers tend to consider a consumer's mind as a black box, which becomes the focus of influence of an endorsement. Consciously or unconsciously, neuromarketing as well as neuroception play a prominent role in the marketing process.

Neuroscience and its applications to marketing help in understanding the implications of the upheavals in neural networks and contribute significantly to the persuasion efforts in the context of a consumer facing a specific brand.

Different marketing researchers perceive the development and application of neuromarketing knowledge in dissimilar manners. Lots of research has been conducted in the application of neuro science in marketing, particularly in the application of consumer preferences.

Emily R. Murphy, Judy Illes, and Peter B. Reiner (2008) ascertain brain-based information about consumer preferences, purporting to bypass focus groups and other marketing research techniques on the premise that directly peering into a consumer's brain while viewing products or brands is a much better predictor of consumer behavior.

In neuromarketing, brain stimuli and social interaction are central concepts to understand what motivates consumer behaviour to make the buying decision (HenrikWaltera et al., 2010). Both concepts are investigated in consumers using neuroimaging methods.

Brain image has been shown that a system exists in humans that is involved in brand preference and thus guides behaviour, involving a circuit including the striatum, the orbito frontal cortex and the amygdala. The image as well as the visualizing system is engaged in economic decision making. Implications of this study for neuromarketing as well as general implications may help to provide deeper insights into the motivating forces of consumer behaviour.

Powerful brands have an emotional selling proposition, ESP, that refers to the unique personality and image attributes that a particular endorsement generates. However, celebrity endorsers are also more than likely to be considered attractive and thus differences in the ESP would be very small. Such differences in an emotional response could be measured by a participant's electrodermal activity (EDA), which is an application of neurology in the field of marketing.

In view of the little work done in the application of neuroscience in the field of celebrity marketing, specially in India, it would be interesting to examine the subject of celebrity selection as well as a consumer's affinity towards the characteristics of a celebrity in neurological terms.

Understanding the dynamics of the human brain and identifying the location of the affinity factors in its lobe would help the marketers to fine-tune the factors which affect the relevant part of the brain.

Consider the communication strategy of McDonalds using the names of certain old, evergreen Bollywood celebrities in the decades of 1950-80 in India. Consumers would be nostalgic with respect to any reference related to them. McDonalds introduced this concept of celebrity nostalgia by introducing their happy price menu product, hitting the consumer's response to the price aspect. The strategy used was to price the product as low as it was during those times.

Nostalgia acts here as a stimulus on the temporal lobe situated in the pre-frontal cortex or the memory location of the human brain. When an endorser creates nostalgic movements in the consumer's brain, the temporal lobe is actively charged and the brain is stimulated with the generation of a purchase intent.

Simultaneously the price affects the right ventral striatum of the brain for rewards and recognition helping the consumer to analyze the low price effect which rounded with the celebrity stimulus finally leads to the act of purchasing.

Our knowledge of how the brain's preference system work is rather elementry. Any marketing activity creating a high response in the reward system may not necessarily correlate with a clear cut preference for the brand. The reason could be that this reward system is composed of several structures,

which may interact and compete for the final verdict.

Theoretically, one can correlate a simple image with a specific brain activity, but in the real world setting it would be a complex matter. If one watches a soft drink TV advertisement, say Pepsi, endorsed by the Indian cricket captain, M.S.Dhoni, is the activity in the brain due to the image related memories or related gossip? Could it be the result of an association with a jingle? It would be difficult to predict which of these factors influence the consumer to purchase the brand. In this case it would be necessary to scan the human brain to determine what characteristics of the endorser, have hit a particular lobe of the brain. Mirror neurons are the latent stimulants working here.

We find that complex processes are at work to explain the association between consumer behavioral response and the endorser characteristics logically married to the product and its subsequent impact on the consumer.

Celebrity-Product fit match is an important criterion in the celebrity selection process. There can be cases of match failures, where the consumer's neurons may not be firing as expected by the advertisers as well as those of successes. An endorsement by the prominent cricketer Sachin Tendulkar hitting a ball with his MRF endorsed bat may light up the neurons as if one is actually hitting the ball. Marketers employ this brain function by observing the consumer's brain activity using instruments like fMRI, to figure out what activity by the endorser makes the neurons fire up.

This paper is thus an effort to create a platform for the researchers in the field of neuro celebrity marketing. As mentioned, in recent years, work has been done in each of the fields of celebrity endorsement as well as neuromarketing independently. An attempt has been made to establish a link between the two. The further scope of this research lies in examining the association of factors entering the process of selection of a celebrity in the context of the involvement of the appropriate area of the lobe. This study has been presented in a form that should provoke the researcher to examine the consumer's brain in decoding the celebrity induced behaviour.

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