

## STUDY OF IMPACT OF CELEBRITY ASSOCIATION ON BRAND BUILDING- AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*One of the potential sources of value to a brand might be the knowledge that consumers' have of the secondary entities that are linked to a particular brand. In the cases, where secondary associations are strong, the secondary entity will ultimately become an integral part of the consumers' brand knowledge. Moreover, it is difficult or even impossible for an individual brand to control the secondary associations. So, the secondary associations are double edged sword which can work either way. Therefore, at least information about the various forms these associations may take and their implications should be valuable inputs to brand builders' decision making.*

*The present paper is important to brand builders. The paper aims to examine the negative experiences of the celebrity associations with a brand as a secondary source of information. It also analyses the various forms of celebrity association with a brand and the implications related to it.*

**Keywords:** Celebrity Association, Secondary Association, Brand Building, Negative Experience, Consumer Knowledge

### Introduction

Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, once said, "Our most valuable assets are our intangible assets." The intangible asset he was referring to is a brand. The Dictionary of Business & Management defines a brand as: "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitor".

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 (Katyal, 2007). Celebrity Endorsement is viewed as a billion dollar industry in today's era

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(Kambitsis et al, 2002). 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 (Temperley & Tangen, 2006). Celebrity endorsement is increasingly being employed across various industries regardless of the product type. It is known to be playing the role of a signalling strategy. (Mustafa, 2005). Also, according to Reynolds (2000) celebrity endorsement can give a brand a touch of glamour. Everything said and done, one have to weigh the potential risks vs. 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.

The topic of celebrity endorsement for brand-building and its effects are heavily documented but the aim of this paper is to study the topic in Indian light as much work has not been done in Indian context. Today's time is of brands. The marketplace has become a battlefield amongst the various brands. The strength of business depends on the strength of the brand that it develops. Companies invest its energy and money in building and sustaining the brands. A number of ways are adopted in order to achieve strong brand recognition. A promising way of doing it is 'secondary association'. For decades, companies are doing it and enjoying the fruit. But looking at the present scenario, it's the time for companies to think again before using such association.

The secondary association entities range from geographical location to a celebrity. Celebrity endorsement is a most common form out of all. The companies like Nike, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Dabur, Lux have successfully done it and the list is exhaustive. Snapdeal hired Amir Khan in Feb. 2015 as its brand ambassador with a campaign 'Dil ki Deal'. The controversy erupted after the statement made by Amir Khan at a function. The statement polarised the nation. People say it hurts their patriotic sentiments. Irate customers have downgraded the Snapdeal's app on Google playstore prompting the company to distance itself from him. The

one year endorsement deal comes to an end in the month of Feb. 2016. It was extendable by a year but the company decided against it.

This was the Amir Khan's second experience after the controversy. In January 2016, tourism ministry dropped Amir Khan as brand ambassador of the Incredible India campaign that the actor was associated with since 2009. The situation needs to be analysed as Snapdeal expected to increase its sales and earn a profit through this secondary association as Amir Khan is thought to have a clean image. There is a positive association of people with Amir Khan. The company expected that same positive association to be transferred to the business. But it proved to be counterproductive.

This is not happening for the first time. There is track, of brands which have already faced the ire before. The brand's linkage to a secondary entity causes the occurrence of secondary brand associations because this entity typically has its own knowledge structure in the consumer's memory. Thus, consumers can infer brand value by "borrowing" from other information sources than the product itself.

Table I- Potential advantages and Potential Hazards of Celebrity Association

Potential Advantages	Potential Hazards
Increased Attention	Overshadow the Brand
Image Polishing	Public Controversy
Brand Introduction	Image Change and Overexposure
Brand Repositioning	Image change and Loss of Public Recognition
Underpin Global Campaigns	Expensive

Source: Erdogan 1999, Pg. 295

The instrument of celebrity association has nowadays become a pervasive element in advertising and communication management. Despite the costs and the risks involved with this technique of advertising, it has been used quite extensively in the present era. In India, while most brands will proclaim that they will only make endorsements deals that fit well with endorser's image, in reality, each endorser's portfolio consists of diverse brands. At one point of time, Amitabh Bachchan was endorsing more than 50 brands across disparate product categories. As per estimates by AdEx, Shahrukh Khan endorsed 17 brands in 2009 while Dhoni led the year with 19 endorsements. The leading Bollywood ladies like Katrina Kaif and Priyanka Chopra endorsed 12 and 10 brands respectively (The Economic Times – 3 February, 2010). The power distance dimension of culture provides an explanation for the same in emerging countries like India whose score on PDI is different from United States.

Another question that should find its place in the document is, “is celebrity association really needed for the success of a product?” Some researchers also suggest that ads without celebrity have a good chance of being as effective as with them. For example Hutch and Vodafone did a good job of brand building in comparison to Coke which has many big celebrities's name associated with it.

## **Methodology**

The objective of the present study is to examine the spill over effects of behaviour of the celebrity association on a host brand. This research examines the conditions in which the effect of 1 partner's behavior in a marketing alliance is likely to spill over to the other. The paper is conceptual in nature and the relevant secondary data is collected from the newspapers, journals and websites. The present paper aims at:

- Examining the negative experiences of brand endorsement with various international and Indian brands

- Finding out the various forms and their consequent effects of celebrity association with a brand

## Literature Review

Consumers' brand value judgements are primarily based on brand elements directly associated with the underlying product such as instrumental properties, physical characteristics, and packaging (Keller 1993). Judgements can also be based on indirect or secondary associations, that is, associations related to entities not directly linked to the judged product. Such entities include companies, country of origin, channel of distribution, other brands, and spokesperson (Keller 1998). The brand's linkage to a secondary entity causes the occurrence of secondary brand associations because this entity typically has its own knowledge structure in the consumer's memory (Keller 1993). Keller (1993) also argued that to develop efficient brand building practices in today's highly competitive marketplaces, one has to understand the brand-levering process (i.e. effects on consumers of linking a brand to secondary entity), as well as the cognitive factors affecting this process. "Celebrity is an omnipresent feature of society, blazing lasting impressions in the memories of all who cross its path." Kurzman et.al (2007). 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).

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 glamour world. Unlike the foreign counterparts, they Indians always placed a halo behind their heads implying that

their celebrities could do no wrong. (Anonymous, 2001). Indeed, some people are seen to admire, imitate, and become fanatical with their favorite celebrities, which form the celebrity endorsement, quite a sought after advertisement technique (McCutcheon et.al 2003).

M. Gayathri Devi and Dr. C. Ramanigopal (2010), in their paper entitled “Impact of celebrity endorsement on Indian market” stated that it is still debatable whether Celebrity endorsement has a positive or a negative impact on the brand that is open to interpretation. But till the time the corporate world continues to foot fancy bills of celebrity endorsers and till consumers continue to be in awe of the stars, the party is not likely to break up. Marketers also claim that celebrity increase the memorability of the message, credibility of the claim made and may overall positive effect around the brand. (Ohanian 1991) The use of attractive people is a common practice for television and print advertising. Physically attractive communicators proved to be more successful in influencing customers’ attitude and beliefs than unattractive spokespersons.

(Shekhar Mishra, Sharon E. Beatty, 1990) Conventional wisdom regarding the matching of spokesperson and brand in advertising is empirically tested. Within the theoretical framework of social cognition, celebrity-brand congruence is found to enhance effectiveness of advertising. a) Recall is found to be enhanced when the celebrity and brand are matched, as predicted by the filtering model. b) Transfer of affect from spokesperson to brand is found to be facilitated when the two are matched. c) Affect toward the brand is also found to be higher when brand and spokesperson are matched. The usefulness and importance of schemas in information processing of advertising are discussed. (Dinesh Kumar Gupta, 2007) The effectiveness of using a celebrity to endorse a firm's product can generally be improved by matching the image of the celebrity with the personality of the product and the actual or desired self concept of the target market.

A celebrity's presence in the ad should be contextual. When Sachin Tendulkar declares, "Boost is the secret of my energy," it doesn't seem out of context. Internationally, Nike's association with Michael Jordan is legendary and also logical. "Studies show that using celebrities can increase consumers' awareness of the ad, capture [their] attention and make ads more memorable" (Kimiko L. Martinez, 2001).

Till and Shimp (1998), conclude that the association Between Celebrity Endorsement, Brand Image and Brand Equity endorsement isn't an easy option but needs careful thought, starting with strategic justification and carrying through all stages in the advertising and the promotional campaign.

Theory and practice proves that the use of superstars in advertising generates lot of publicity and attention (Ohanian,1991). Furthermore, advertising and marketing managers will get more leverage on consumers' brand equity evaluations if celebrity endorsements are consistent with all other IMC tools such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions and direct marketing (Pickton and Broderick, 2005).

(Brian D. Till, Michael Busler, 1998) The importance of fit between the endorser and the endorsed product has been described as the "match-up hypothesis". Much "match-up hypothesis" research has focused on physical attraction. The two studies collectively suggest that, while attractive endorsers do positively affect attitude toward the endorsed brand, expertise is a more important dimension for driving the fit between an endorser and a brand. In addition, moral failures were more detrimental than competence failures in a spokesperson alliance, whereas the reverse was true in a supplier alliance. (Nicole L. Votola H., 2006). (Diana Seno, Bryan A. Lukas, 2007) Prepared a conceptual framework that can be used to organise and guide future research into how celebrity product endorsement creates equity for both the endorsed product-brand and the endorsing celebrity. The theoretical perspective

adopted in this study is that celebrity product endorsement is a form of co-branding. The central thesis is that both endorser image and brand image serve as mediators in the equity-creation process of celebrity product endorsement

The celebrity may assume any of the following roles:

**Endorsement:** celebrities often lend their names to ads for product or services for which they may or may not be the experts For instance Sachin Tendulkar has been endorsing the Palio brand of Fiat.

**Testimonial:** If the celebrity has personally used a product or service and is in a position to attest its quality, then he or she may give a testimonial citing its benefits. For instance Aishwarya Rai endorses Lux by testifying the quality of the product as it forms a part of her consumption basket.

**Actor:** A Celebrity may be asked to present a product or service as a part of character enactment rather than personal testimonial or endorsement. For instance Sweta Tiwari of “Perna fame” (Kasuti Zindagi ki ) enacts as a housewife for Nirma’s ad campaign. It has nothing to do with her on screen or off-screen image In fact she just enacts the character and expectations of a normal housewife from a detergent bar.

**Spokesperson:** A celebrity who represents a brand or company over an extended periods of time often in print and TV ads as well as in personal appearances is usually called a company’s spokesperson. (Schiffman and Kanuk,1997)

They increase awareness of a company’s advertising create positive feelings towards brands and are perceived by consumers as more entertaining (Solomon, 2002) Using a celebrity in advertising is therefore likely to positively affect consumer’s brand attitude and purchase intentions. Cyber media research study published in business world unearthed different truths

about celebrity endorsement. The study spread over 3 phases in different cities of India (Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Nasik, Coimbatore, Meerut) 12 focus group interviews, 6 expert instruments and 8 expert interviews with ad agencies were conducted. Besides this survey of 480 respondent in 4 cities and 3375 respondent in 8 cities helped to develop different insights on celebrity endorsements that are given as under:

- Over 80% of people remembered the celebrity but forget about the brand.
- Different stars appealed to different geographic groups of customers (eg., Aishwarya Rai had highest recall in down south as against ShahRukh Khan who had little appeal there).
- Research emphasized that ad without celebrity had a good a chance of working as one with them. For instance, Hutch ad did better jobs of building a brand then coke which had many big celebrity names associated with it.

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

## Discussion

The late '80s saw the beginning of celebrity endorsements in advertising in India. Hindi film and TV stars as well as sportspersons began encroaching on a territory that was, until then, the exclusive domain of models. There was a surge of advertising, featuring stars like Tabassum (Prestige pressure cookers), Jalal Agha (Pan Parag), Kapil Dev (Palmolive Shaving Cream). One of the first sports endorsements in India was when Farokh Engineer became the first Indian Cricketer to model for Brylcreem.

Sunil Gavaskar (Dinesh Suitings). Of course, probably the first ad to cash in on star power in a strategic, long-term, mission statement kind of way was for Lux soap, a brand which has, perhaps as a result of this, been among the top three in the country for much of its lifetime.

Endorsement by celebrities is not new and has started since a long time. The very fact that their use has continued for so long is proof enough of its gigantic advantages, but it has several disadvantages too. When it comes to celebrity endorsement, the first brand that comes to the Indian mind is that of Lux, the Beauty Bar of the Stars. Since its inception, Lux the brand has grown positioning itself like this only. However, recently Lux has tried to change its positioning from being a woman's soap to being soap for men as well. Sticking to its strategy of using celebrities to appeal to its target audience, it used Shah Rukh Khan to endorse Lux. But this time the response has been confusing as people failed to connect.

The brand-builders and the decision makers should be cautious before diving into the world of celebrity endorsements. There's no doubt that the celebrity endorsement offer immense benefits but at the same time, they shouldn't be ignorant about the ill effects that it may hide behind. The people responsible for brand building should take care of the following situations of celebrity and brand association:

- **Too many associations are difficult to remember:** Because of the high number of associations, difficulties could occur in trying to tie another brand to Pepsi in Indian market.
- **The association may turn out to be positive or negative:** It is also very important to remember that positive and also negative associations can be created. An example is the Wills sponsorship for Indian cricket team where the brand is associated with cigarettes. There is no guaranty that the audience watching cricket belongs to the smoking part of population and in today's world full of "healthy ways of life" some people may connect negative associations with cigarettes.
- **Negative behaviour of the associated celebrity may spill over to the host brand:** Coca-cola drops Salman Khan, ending four year deal with actor. Salman Khan has been the centre of social media storm on employing Pakistani actors in Indian film and, in recent past for comparing his exhaustion after a film shoot to the experience of a woman being raped. He is also a defendant in a number of court cases.
- **Heavy investments may not return the expected gain:** Industry insiders say investments in hiring big celebrities are huge and that recent experiences have taught many big companies that such punts are not paying off. As PepsiCo Chairman D Shivkumar said, "Stars are exposed to social media and people follow them all the time. So the novelty of being close to, knowing details about them or seeing them has waned. So we are moving to the sources of authority."

### **International Scenario**

During 1970s, former football star O.J. Simpson was the face of Hertz rental cars. In 1992, Hertz dumped Simpson, when the allegations of domestic abuse were reported against the

star. The company paid a hefty amount to the star, who later was arrested for a murdering his ex-wife Nicole Brown and her friend.

Pepsi has burned its hands more than any other brand in its category by associating itself with celebrity spokesperson with controversies. In 1989 with Madonna, In 2002 with Rene Gracido and then with rapper Ludacris. These stars were caught with different controversies at different point of time for which the company paid a cost.

Christian Dior had to drop all Chinese advertisements featuring Sharon Stone after the actress made insensitive remarks regarding a devastating earthquake saying that all this happened because of the bad karma of the people who died. Kate Moss was axed from various fashion lines after the release of the photos of the British supermodel snorting cocaine. Burberry, Chanel and H&M all decided to drop, or renew their contracts with, Moss.

Yardley cosmetics ended its association with the British actress Helena Bonham Carter soon after the actress announced that she never wore makeup and, thus, had no idea why the brand had chosen her (1990). Chewing gum maker Wrigley and the Milk Processor Education Program, ended their contracts with R&B performer Chris Brown after the singer found guilty for assaulting his former girlfriend, Rihanna.

AT&T and Rosetta Stone ended their deals with Olympic gold medallist Michael Phelps, after a picture surfaced in which the swimmer was smoking pot at a part at the University of Southern Carolina. Both the companies decided not to renew their contract with the swimmer. Kellogg Co. also dropped Phelps, ending his deal, and released a statement that his druggie persona is not consistent with the image of Kellogg.

## **INDIAN SCENARIO- VARIOUS FORMS AND CHALLENGES OF CELEBRITY AND BRAND ASSOCIATION**

The role of brand ambassadors has been under scrutiny since the Indian cricket icon Mahendra Singh Dhoni was bombarded with tweets by unhappy residents of Amrapali society of which he was a brand ambassador, over inaccessible delay in house possession and incomplete handover, asking Dhoni to dissociate himself from the builder. In the report, the Committee headed by Telugu Desam Party MP JC Divakar Reddy has submitted recommendations to Parliament laying down stringent provisions including jail term up to five years and hefty penalty of up to 50 lakh in order to protect consumer interest.

"The Central Consumer Protection Council's (CCPC) view was that celebrities should be responsible for misleading advertisements," Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said.

Since then a lot of debate has transpired on the role of a brand ambassador and what happens if a product fails on committed values. Are brand ambassadors liable to punishment? Celebrities who influence masses to buy a product, based on their eminent role as respected leaders in their fields, should they not be held responsible to some degree for the failure of a product? This controversial point of debate in Indian advertising context has been put to rest with the Parliamentary panel suggestions. It comes strong especially for misrepresentation of food product.

Celebrities have been facing criticism over brand endorsements. Some celebrities have come under fire recently for endorsing brands outside their arena.

1. **Faulty Association:** The case of actor Salman Khan being made a goodwill ambassador of Indian contingent for Rio Olympics has got the reaction as- a film star promoting sports. This is ignoring a number of shining sport stalwarts. The focus has come on the organisation too - the Indian Olympic Association and why the organisation bypassed the merits of those within the sports to select a personality who is not a sports person.

2. **Mismatch between the stature of celebrity and host brand:** The phenomenon of failure of celebrity and brand endorsement is not new. Maruti Versa when launched few years back, brought Amitabh and Abhishek Bachan onboard as brand ambassadors. But despite their combined fan-following, Versa's sales was not able to pick up in the market. People might have been drawn to the showroom because of the stardom but because of the faulty positioning, it was not able to gain the expected performance. People were expecting a larger-than-life car just like its brand ambassador and came disappointed.
3. **Mismatch between positioning of the brand and the image of the celebrity:** Another case of mistaken identity was committed by Swiss watch maker manufacture- Hublot in choosing a worthy brand identity in India. The brand is known for fusion of traditional art with 21<sup>st</sup> century designs while retaining the unique timeless Hublot feeling for watch design. The brand's identity has nothing in common with its brand ambassador, Harbhajan Singh and the association led to the confusion of consumers.
4. **The celebrity's association with too many brands:** Besides the faulty positioning, another problem is to endorse too many brands at one time which leads to confusion and brand disconnect. The same happened to Nerolac Paints when they hired Amitabh Bachan as their brand ambassador who was already endorsing many brands. When Nerolac Paints asked people to connect Amitabh Bachan with any paint, 80 per cent respondents named Asian paints, the biggest competitor of Nerolac Paints in India.
5. **Spill over effect of the negative behaviour of the celebrity:** Another problem with celebrity endorsement is that the image of the product endorsed is seen in the light of image of its ambassador. This happened in case of Thumbs Up, when they hired

Salman Khan as brand ambassador. Initially the association brought the desired results, the real problem started when image of the star went far beyond the 'macho' and was very soon out of control and illegal after a series of incidents (the Chinkara hunting, rash driving etc.). Soon after the Thumbs Up's image started take a beating and was looked upon as renegade drink- a reputation it didn't want.

- 6. Mismatch between expectation from the celebrity and the message given:** The ire of the customers sometimes have to be born by the celebrity. When during the World cup, Virat Kohli say 'par utna hi zaroori hai perform karna jab helmet off ho' in front of camera while endorsing Fair & Lovely. People wondered why, one of the most promising cricketer in the world, was suddenly encouraging future generation to be more superficial.

## Conclusion

The paper addressed a popular method of marketing communication: use of celebrity brand association for brand communication. There is no two opinions about the fact which is also proven from time to time by various researches that celebrity association is still a very effective tool for marketing communication. A brief assessment of current and a recent past of market situations indicate that it is essential for the decision makers to be aware of the complex processes underlying celebrity endorsement. As several failure show, it is fundamental to take care of the right match and right circumstances while using the celebrity association for brand building.

Celebrities now will have to exercise extreme caution in selection of brand endorsements as the Parliamentary Standing Committee is all out to make celebrities responsible for misleading ads. It may be concluded that the whole endorsement scenario would change with the onus of a product to some extent falling on the celebrity endorsing it. All those celebrities

who had been getting the dough without an inclination of the product they were endorsing will now think twice and perhaps understand the dilemma of customers more clearly when they too face the same situation of judging a product.

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