

Chapter 73

Studying Celebrity Engagement on Social Media: An Indian Experience

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ABSTRACT

Leveraging a celebrity for instant recognition and visibility or building significant brand credibility and driving sales has been a long-established recipe for success over the years. Engaging a reputed face for brand promotion has ever been an exorbitant investment. Digital or social media as a communication platform has not only driven brands to create a desired recall without the burden of unreasonable spends, but has also strengthened and empowered celebrity engagement like never before by throwing a versatile array of options for individual branding and visibility. This chapter aims to explore and analyse the engagement of celebrity on different social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, Twitter etc. with special reference to Bollywood. It delves into understanding the engagement patterns; aspects of celebrity evoked; brand impact; media celebrity brand fit, and intended target audience whether it leads to action or Influences perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

It's quite a known fact that celebrity endorsement has a huge market in India. It is one of the most popular approaches for communicating a brand or product to the consumers. Experts claim that almost 45% of commercials in India are endorsed by a celebrity. Roughly 10% of communication budgets are being used to pay for endorsers. Using celebrities facilitates recall of the message as well as the brand name which the celebrity is endorsing (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995). According to this research; when a celebrity is paired with a brand, the image of the celebrity helps in shaping the image of the brand in the minds of the consumers.

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Though endorsement deals in India have extended to an array of celebrity from sports, fashion, music, yet *Bollywood* or Hindi Cinema in particular continues to be the most admired place where celebrities enjoy maximum brand endorsements with admirable valuations ranging from 2.5 crore to as high as 10 crore per day depending upon their box office standing.

The simple logic behind this is that celluloid celebs in India have always been heavily aspirational as they are believed to have a God-like eminence. An element of curiosity and allure associated with *Bollywood* celebs in particular has been influence enough in setting an adrenalin rush, euphoria and triggering a frenzy of sorts for getting a glimpse into their lives.

Being a public figure, celebrities are individual brands in themselves. Audience perceive an image about them based on their attributes, appearances, personality, disposition, behaviour and lifestyle as displayed on the public platform. Precisely, it is the external interface which is the crux of any celebrity's brand image in the mind-space of their admirers manifesting into an impressionable outcome as viewers, audiences and even consumers. The recall value for a celebrity endorsed brand, the ability to reach out better and of course to bring a brand into a consumers' consideration set have all made celebrity endorsement an easy route for consumer connect. It is this Public acknowledgement of a celebrity that has been consistently leveraged across platforms for communicating a brand (McCracken, 1989) over the years.

Purchasing a brand endorsed by a favourite celebrity has therefore been a long-preferred strategy for generating a "me-too effect" among the target group. Hence whenever any celebrity is picked up for endorsement their ability to bring about an effective rub-off with the endorsed brand in terms of characteristics and image remains a prime concern for impact. Precisely, the brand image must be essentially matched with the celebrity image for the endorsement to be more effective and impactful. This is an indication that hiring one of the most popular celebrities may not essentially be a spot-on strategy; it might boomerang if the endorsed brand's values, personality and attributes do not coincide with those of the endorser. There may also be a possibility of overriding of the brand under the fame and popularity of the celebrity. Tracking down the years it has been observed that the range of celebrity engagement with the media and the audience has shown variations and evolved from magazine photo shoots, interviews, appearances at events like live shows, supporting a social cause, canvassing for political parties to extensive endorsement contracts for a particular Brand or organization. Depending upon the type of engagement the celebrities can display either a low, medium, high, or transformational level of commitment (Huddart, 2005).

Apart from congruence with the brand media and audience, an important attribute for effect has been the extent of familiarity of the celebrity to the TG being addressed as well as the esteem value & the ability to differentiate, be in sync with the TG and yet stand out (Lalwani, 2006). There are several studies reflecting that whenever celebrities are roped in for brand endorsement a mix of attractiveness (Baker & Churchill, 1977) and credibility (Sternthal, & Dholakia, 1978) has always been vital, the entire plan being translating these abilities to the products through marcom activities (Langmeyer & Walker 1991a, 1991b; Mc Cracken, 1989; Walker et al. 1992).

A suitable match between the celebrity's personality and product's attributes has the ability to trigger consumer senses more positively leading to favourable Brand perceptions. (Michael 1989 & Ohanin, 1991). Consumers tend to establish a linkage between celebrity lifestyle and that of the brand which prompts them to opt for particular brand disregards of its price, availability or any other factor. Various industry researches have also endorsed the findings that celebrities do create brand differentiation. Another major conclusion that can be drawn is that Celebrity Endorsement significantly impacts Brand Image.

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