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SELECTING CELEBRITY ENDORSERS – FRAMEWORK FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS

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Abstract

Celebrities are good at generating attention, recall and positive attitudes towards advertising provided that they are supporting a good idea and there is an explicit fit between them and the brand (Zipporah and Mberia, 2014). There are many success stories of using celebrity advertising in both India and abroad. However, few companies fail in their celebrity advertising campaign. Sometime, negative effect of celebrity endorsers can also happen. In this context, companies and advertising agencies are finding difficult to select celebrity endorsers for their product. The present study will help the brand managers to select the celebrity to endorse their brand by adopting a framework during the selection process.

Keywords: celebrity, endorsers, selection framework, vampire effect, residual effect

Introduction

Competition rules the world not only in business but also in other fields. To face competition, corporate follows different strategies to distinguish their product from their counterparts. Some companies follow sales promotion strategies to retain their place in the market and others adopt innovative advertising strategies. Advertising, with its various forms, can easily penetrate into large audience. However, getting immediate attention of audience is a prime task in the advertising process and this is accomplished by the usage of celebrities.

Celebrities are famous personalities who are well known to the public. Because of their fame, celebrities serve not only to create and maintain attention but also to achieve high recall rates for communication messages in today's high media cluttered

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environment (Friedman and Friedman, 1979; Croft et al, 1996). Over the past decade, the use of celebrities in advertising has been increasing widely. In 1979, celebrity endorsers' use in commercials was estimated as one in every six advertisements (Howard 1979). By 1988, estimates were one in five (Motavalli, 1988), and Shimp (1997) claimed that around 25 per cent of all U.S based commercials utilize celebrities. The percentage is bound to increase in the forthcoming years.

Crores of rupees are spent by the corporate on celebrity endorsement contracts with the aim that the source effect plays an important role in persuasive communication. In spite of the above mentioned benefits of using celebrities, ample criticism also available in the literature. Benefits of using celebrities can reverse markedly if they, for example sudden change in image, drop in popularity, get into a situation of moral turpitude, lose credibility by over endorsing or overshadow endorsed products (Cooper, 1984; Kaikati, 1987). It has been found that the negative information about a celebrity endorser not only influence consumers' perception of the celebrity, but also the endorsed product (Klebba and Unger, 1982; Till and Shimp, 1995). Cooper (1984) says, "The product, not the celebrity, must be the star". In celebrity advertisements the corporate should meticulously plan for matching the celebrity with the product.

The complexity of issues related to the selection of celebrities make the job of brand executives more challenging. Hence an attempt has been made in this paper to develop a framework for selecting a right celebrity.

SELECTING CELEBRITY ENDORSERS

Selecting a celebrity endorser is an important job on the part of product manager since it involves a huge amount of money. Proper selection of celebrities will result in increased advertisement effectiveness. For example, Boost endorsed by Kapil dev and Nike by Michael Jordan are the successful celebrity advertisements in the recent years. While selecting celebrities firm should consider the celebrity's impact on variables like brand awareness, recall of copy points, message arguments, brand attitudes and purchase

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intention (Belch and Belch 1995). A celebrity should be selected based on the product, because the meaning and values of the celebrity will be transferred to the audience through message or action. Tamizhjyothi and Samudhra Rajakumar (2005) confirmed that if the celebrity advertisement is effective only when the celebrity matches with the product being endorsed and also with the audience who receives the message.

The framework for selecting a celebrity endorser is given in the following diagram. This framework is named as Tamizhjyothi-Samudra model framework for selecting celebrity endorsers.

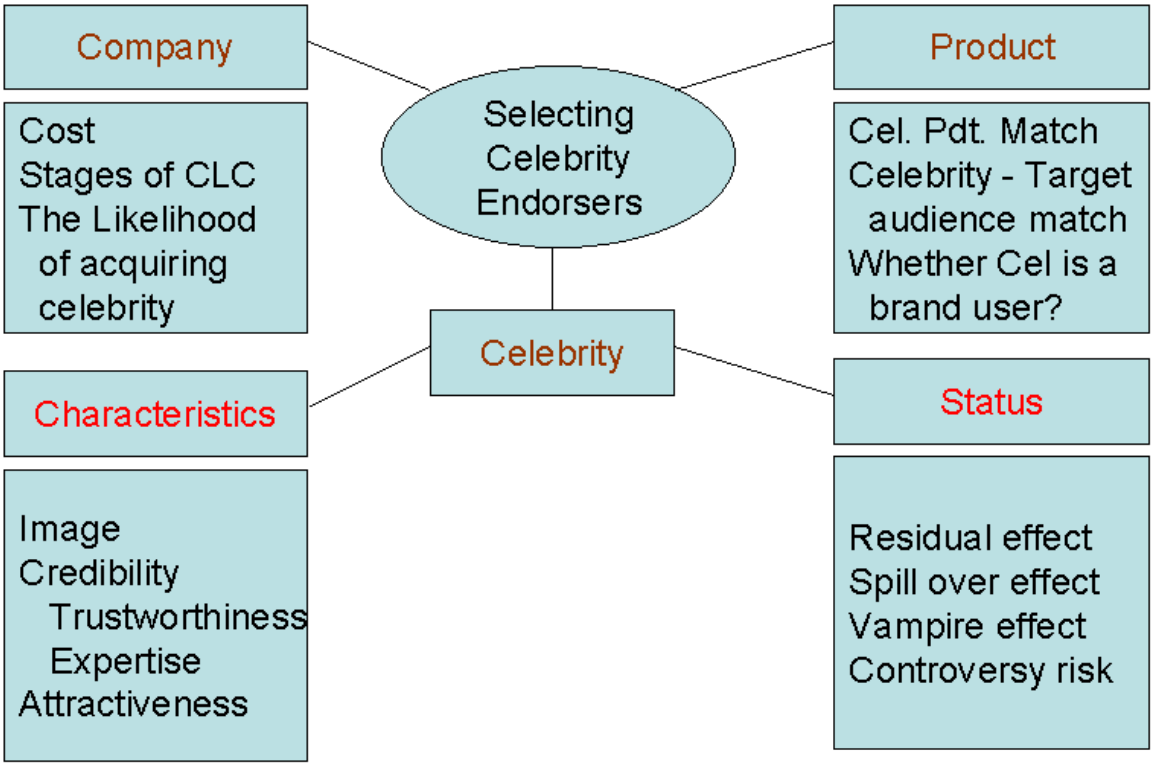


Fig. Tamizhjyothi – Samudhra Model Framework for selecting Celebrity Endorsers

In celebrity endorsement, it is the contract between the company and celebrity on behalf of the product. Hence the selection must be considered in a three dimensional view, company, product and celebrity.

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I. Company

It is the first person in the endorsement contract which needs their products to be advertised among the audience. They spend huge amounts in advertisements in order to create awareness about their product in the market. Since celebrities are known to public, corporate use celebrities in their advertisements. From the company point of view it should consider two aspects for selecting celebrity endorsers.

i. Cost of acquiring celebrity endorsers.

Company spend enormous amount of money on the celebrities to endorse their product. Depending upon the nature and wealth of the company they fix the celebrities. Pepsi paid $3.2 billion to pop singer Madonna and Nike paid $4 billion to basket ball hero Michael Jordan. Richest sportspersons in the world like Michael Schumacker, Tiger woods, Sachin Tendulkar are brand ambassadors of several companies. Sometimes the cost of the celebrities is high but the benefit from them will be less. However, small organizations could not spend huge amount in selecting the famous celebrities. Hence the cost is an important factor to be considered in selecting the celebrity endorsers.

ii. Stages in celebrity life cycle.

As product has life cycle, celebrity also has life cycle called Celebrity Life Cycle (CLC). While selecting the celebrities, corporate should consider the various stages of product in PLC and celebrities in CLC like introduction, growth, maturity and decline. Each stage has its own advantages and disadvantages. For example if the product is new to the market, then they should use a celebrity who is in growth or maturity stage (TVS Victor – Sachin Tendulkar).

II. Product

Product is the third person in the endorsement contract for which the contract is signed between the company and celebrity.

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(i) Celebrity – Product – Target audience match

The company should select the celebrities by keeping in mind about the product and target audience. For a feminine product female celebrities are preferable than male and vice versa. They should select the celebrities from specialized field for their product, for example, health and energy drink could be endorsed by sportspersons and cosmetics items by female cine stars. While concentrating the celebrities and product, the target audience should also be considered. One cannot telecast advertisement with Hindi cine stars for a product which is exclusively available in Tamil nadu, because the user of that products are the Tamil people and they prefer Tamil celebrities or some other celebrities who are well known to them instead of unknown Hindi celebrities. Samudhrarajakumar and Tamizh Jyothi (2005) found that the Hindi cine star Saif AliKhan endorsing Pepsi has very less awareness among the consumers in Tamil nadu. Thus the celebrity, product and target audience match should be considered for the celebrity selection.

(ii) Multi product endorser

Some celebrities endorse more than one product, which is called as multi-brand endorsement. They endorse different products from different fields. For example, Indian cricket star Sachin Tendulkar endorse Boost, TVS Victor, Fiat Palio, Brittania Tiger biscuits, Pepsi, MRF, Addidas etc. and Bollywood super star Amithab bachchan endorse Pepsi, ICICI Bank, Nerolac paints, Cadburys' chocolates, Maruthi Versa, Dabur, Parker pen, Eveready batteries etc. Since these two celebrities are in the top ten celebrities list (Brand Equity, 2003), consumers will have positive attitude, even if they endorse various brands, whereas some celebrities' multi-product endorsement will reduce the credibility of the endorser and also the product. Tripp, Jenson and Carson (1994) found that the effect of a celebrity endorsing multiple products would reduce the celebrities' credibility and likeability and lower attitude towards the advertisement itself. If a celebrity's image ties in with many brands, impact and identity with each product may lessen since the relationship between the celebrity and a particular brand is not distinctive (Mowen and Brown 1981). This can make consumers overtly aware of the true nature of endorsement which has less to do with brand/product attribute, and more to do with generous

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compensation for the celebrity, leading consumers to overt cynicism about their motives (Cooper, 1984, Tripp et al 1994). Tamizhjyothi and Samudhra Rajakumar (2011) have studied the impact of profession on multiple celebrity endorsers and their result shows that the consumers like advertisements featuring both cinestar and sportspersons and their purchase intention has a positive relationship with the multiple celebrity endorsements. Therefore it is important to consider the endorsement of a product by multiple celebrities also while selecting their celebrity endorsers.

III. Celebrities

Celebrities are the second person in the endorsement contract who receives money to endorse a company's product. In celebrity point of view there are two aspects.

1. Characteristics of the celebrities, and
2. Status of the celebrities.

1. Characteristics of the celebrities

The various characteristics of celebrities should be considered by the company while selecting them.

a) Liking

The endorsing person should be liked by the public, so that they listen or watch to the message given by the celebrities. Hence liking is an important character of celebrity for the selection.

b) Credibility

Credibility includes trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness refers to the honesty, integrity and believability of an endorser, which depends on the perception of target audience. Expertise is defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertion. Consumers perceive a product as good quality if it is endorsed by an expert source. Dholakia and Sternthal (1977), Ohanian (1991) manipulated that the effectiveness of a message depends on perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness in an endorser. Thus the celebrity must be experienced in the

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specified field so that the people can associate the characters of the celebrities with the product and thereby the product value will increase.

c) Attractiveness

Attractive person influences the audience more than non-attractive person. In general the female celebrity attracts the male audience than female audience and male celebrity attracts female than male audience. The attractive celebrities will have some positive effect in the persuasion process. Hence attractive celebrities should be selected for any product category.

2. Status

The endorsement process of celebrities will have high risk in many cases. The risk factors can be classified as

a) Residual effect and

b) Vampire effect

a) Residual effect

There are incidents in which celebrities endorse one brand and leave the brand to endorse another competitive brand in the same product category. This may lead to residual effect, which means the consumers think of celebrities association with the first brand have some effect in the newly endorsed brand. It happened in Sourav Ganguly's endorsement where he previously endorsed Coca-cola and after some period he left Coca-cola and joined in "Men in Blue" team to endorse Pepsi. This change over of endorsement may have some effect among the consumers; even if Sourav comes for Pepsi they still associate him with Coke. Hence the company can select the celebrity who endorses the brand, which is not in the same product category.

b) Vampire effect

Mismatching of celebrities and product will create "Vampire effect', which means the celebrity, sucks the life-blood of the product, and the audience remembers the celebrity but not the product (Evans, 1988). In the endorsement of Boxer bike by Amithab Bachchan, people forget about the product except the celebrity. Thus the company should focus on their product and the popularity of the celebrity endorser.

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Conclusion:

When a company needs an effective advertising to persuade the consumers, it should first concentrate on the selection of celebrity endorsers. The framework discussed here guide the corporate to select the right celebrity to save crores of rupees which is spent on wrong selection. Also the firm must consider the celebrity product/brand and celebrity-target audience match to get full potential benefit of celebrity advertising. The brand managers must identify the right celebrity by keeping the long term impact in their mind as celebrity advertisements assist not only to build powerful brand but also to increase the recall level coupled with higher sales.

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