

Celebrity Ad Campaigns: How Celebrities are leveraged by Indian Corporates

Shaina Wij

Bandwagon Communications

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ABSTRACT: *This research paper delves into the role of Indian celebrities in brand endorsements and their ROI to brands. As celebrity endorsements are one of the most preferred marketing tactics of brand managers, it is important to evaluate their effect on the target consumer. Some questions like, does a celebrity face help to drive sales? Or is the brand value of a company directly proportionate to the stature of the celebrity associated with it? Or Does a popular face bring instant publicity for the brand? This research paper gathers insight from young Indians, middle-aged adults and Indian marketing experts to find out brand recognition and popularity basis its celebrity association. The paper also deep dives into the perception of the brand when the associated celebrity is surrounded by scandals and bad press.*

KEYWORDS: celebrity PR, public relations, ad campaigns, celebrity endorsements, brand ambassadors

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, celebrities are used as endorsers for ad campaigns. This practice is considered to be the best and most preferred by brand managers (Amos et al., 2008:234). Annually, each organisation spends humongous amounts of money to sign up famous and eminent faces to endorse their brand (Jaiprakash, 2008; Klaus and Bailey, 2008; Lee and Thorson, 2008). In the year 2004, \$339 million were allotted for celebrity endorsements by the sportswear giant, Nike. 25% of advertisements in the United States feature celebrity endorsers (Erdogan et al.,2001). Meanwhile most of the commercials showcase sports players, cinema stars or TV soap stars in India. This strategy when implied gives an advantage from the conception that the celebrities endorsed give a positive feel to the brand image and to the products that they endorse. Loyalty of the customer and product exclusivity is enhanced with the help of strong links with the famous celebrity. Hence, providing an upper hand than their competitors (Aaker, 1991; Krishnan,1996). The charm of the celebrities in endorsements is magnetic and attracts the attention of various and diverse audiences. This is the reason that entrepreneurs put in higher investments and time in such ad campaigns (Turner, 2004:34).

Many a times, celebrity ad campaigns have proven to be positive for both, the celebrity as well as the company. Sneakers (2005), a collector's guidebook written by Unorthodox Styles

states that it is a similar drive that pushes consumers to invest large sums of money on designer handbags, the analysis of a market research indicate that in spite of there being cheaper products with similar looks or features which are priced at a small fraction of the original branded product. Any unfavourable news about a celebrity from the time of them being signed up, during or after an ad campaign can have a bad influence on the brand's image because by that time, the consumers have already set a link between the brand and that particular celebrity. Bailey (2007) and Edwards and La Ferle (2009) believe that this can cause a considerable set back on the brand.

This research intends to survey the Indian market where the Indian companies benefit and, or detriment their brand value by investing in Celebrity Ad campaigns. This study also investigates the celebrity perspective of choosing the brands to link them with.

Research Questions

RI - Does potential consumer's buying decision gets influenced by the brand ambassador of the brand?

RII - What kind of celebrities would drive the customers to buy a product?

RIII - How well do publicity stunts help brand gain recognition?

Potential consumer - A person who has the potential of consuming a product of a specific brand.

Kind of celebrities - Celebrities from various fields of entertainment like sports, films and television.

Focus group is a useful method that would help in answering the research questions designed. Fenton et al. (1998) suggests that in a focus group setting, it is easier to track 'audience reception' that is, how the newspaper information, radio shows, television programmes etc are perceived by the audience. Hence, this method can be highly reliable to scrutinize the interpretation of media information perceived by the audience at large. It is also true that a focus group discussion takes a shape of a constructive argument that helps to bring forth some realistic insights and thoughts that might be useful for the moderator to gain an in depth knowledge about the research topic (Bryman, 2008a) Therefore, for the present study, focus group would help gain insight for the buying psychology of the consumers.

Hypotheses

HI - A potential consumer might get influenced by a successful brand ambassador to buy the product of a specific brand.

HI - Film stars and sportsmen would drive more customers to buy the brand that they endorse.

HI - There is a positive association of the brand and its brand ambassador in the minds of the consumers.

HI - Celebrities help in building brand loyalty.

HI - Publicity stunts helps the brand gain attention.

METHOD

Focus groups is described by Krueger (1994a: 6) as, 'a vigilantly and premeditated discussion, the objective of the discussion is to acquire discernment on the targeted area of interests in an accommodating and pleasant environment'. It's a group interview with a unique trait of the group's interaction (Kitzinger, 1994:111), which helps develop a detailed discussion on the topic (Carey, 1994). The method is generally used to ruminate the perceptions of each individual in the group; it advocates the opinions about the attitudes are not built up in isolation (Morse and Field, 1996). Producing qualitative and analytical data and not a common consensus are the main aims of having a focus group, the data acquired gives us an overview of the attitudes, concerns and views of the participants (Kingry et al., 1990a:124; Krueger, 1994b), this can be achieved by generating a collective perception on the topic (McElroy, 1997). Focus groups is generally conducted by a moderator who uses an interview style in the discussion, the moderator guides the discussion in an unbiased method with pre-fixed questions (Kingry et al., 1990b). Analyses were driven by the intentions of study, skills and time by the people carry out the research (Morgan, 1993). This method of the analysis is very well organized (Kingry et al., 1990c) and these are reflective in the context of the focus group (Carey and Smith, 1994: 123-127).

Recording- Focus group method is advantageous if it is recorded and transcribed (Bryman, 2008b). The reason for the same is that it is often difficult to pen down what exactly the participants come up in a discussion. Also, recording would be helpful to comprehend the opinions of certain people in the group. The track of the whole group interview can be lost when writing down each and everything as who says what is an essential part of conducting a focus group. Further, the element of 'How they say it' is also important for the researcher to build on his research (Bryman, 2008c). Therefore, for the present research, recording would be done by the consent of the participants in order to capture the details of the focus group interview.

Location - Venue is of utmost importance in terms of familiarity and ease of access. A group interview might be affecting b factors like room size, Temperature, lighting and seating arrangement (Krueger, 1998). An ideal setting can be achieved by ensuring comfort, negating the distractions, creating informal atmosphere and encouraging healthy discussion. Dilorio et al. (1994) suggests that seating arrangement must also ne kept in mind before the start up of the focus group interaction and in order to maximize discussion. He is of the view that circular arrangement is ideal in terms of maximizing interaction and encouraging observation by the moderator.

For the present research, location is a Cardiff University student's accommodation dining area. This would encourage ease of access and familiarity for international Indian students to join the focus group. The seating arrangement would be circular to maximize interaction. The room size is ideal for 6 participants and 1 moderator. The lighting would be apt and environment would be noise free in order to encourage hassle free recording.

Ethics- Ethics in focus group is mainly concerned with two major factors. One being, that the ideas shared by one member of the group are in front of the whole group and not just the researcher. Another main cause of concern being that the ideas shared by various individuals might arise stress or distress in any member of the group (Smith, 1995:478; Hennessy and Heary, 2005; Goodman and Evans, 2006). Priority must be given to safeguard the interests of all the participants in a group. To do so, the consent form before the start of the focus group research plays an important role (Ungar et al., 2006).

For the present research, a content form was handed out before the start of the discussion. This form had directions like the participants could withdraw from the discussion at any point of time. Also, their consent was taken in order to audio record the whole session.

Sample

Focus groups ideally, must consist of different people with similar background and characteristics. This exercise promotes comprehension of an issue at a similar level rather than promoting diversity because it is natural to divulge information to similar people (Morgan, 1988; Krueger, 1994b). A group might be based on the demographic characteristics such as age, sex, location, cultural background, education level etc. and the level of familiarity about the subject (Bryman, 2008d). To attain practicality, there is a need to balance out the two opposite opinionated participants in order to avoid homogeneity that might result in lesser diverse opinions (Gibbs, 1997:133).

A group size of five to six persons is ideal as it provides moderator with a convenient number of people to handle and divert the discussion on his own accord (Morgan et al.,2002).

For the present research, three groups of six people each would be suitable to conduct a focus group.

Group I - Young Indian adults

The purpose of conducting the focus group on young Indian adults is that most of the Indian brands focus their advertisement campaigns on youth by designing their products and services in accordance with the latest trends followed by the youth. It has become clear that brands that are successful in their marketing endeavours have adopted a youth centric approach by using tools like music, fashion, technology, gaming, sports and so on (Masoko, 2012a). Hence, this group can reveal the celebrities that influence their purchasing decision and their brand loyalty.

Group II - Middle aged adults in India

The middle aged adults are crucial buyers. They include parents, employees, and businessmen and so on. The purchasing power of this group is increasing. This segment is crucial for marketers as the buying power determines the spending of the family (Masoko, 2012b). Hence, this group can disclose information of brand loyalty and factors that determine their purchasing power.

Group III - Marketing Professionals

The marketing professionals of big brands are responsible for choosing the right face for their advertisement and promotion of the product. They are aware of the principles governing right marketing of their brand (Marketing Schools, 2012). Hence, these individuals might help to highlight the choice of celebrities to promote sales and profits.

Themes/Questions

There are different strategies and methods to construct the questions to be asked in a focus group interview technique. Morgan and Spanish (1985) employed an open ended questioning technique, this is considered to be the best to put into practice (Bryman, 2008e). Macnaghten and Jacobs (1997) used the methodology of 'topic guide'. In this technique, the areas of discussion included the topic of the focus group. The style of structuring the questions depends on the area of research and level of awareness about the topic in the participants. The decided themes must be constructed in such a way that they answer the research questions clearly (Bryman, 2008f).

For the present research, following themes are picked up:

Theme 1- Does buying decision get influenced by the advertisements seen on television.

Theme 2- Do celebrity endorsers influence buying decision

Theme 3- Is there any association of the brands with its brand ambassadors?

Theme 4- What makes a successful brand ambassador of any brand?

Theme 5 - Does any negative notion about the celebrity alters brand loyalty?

Theme 6 - Publicity stunts - a hit or miss?

Interview Schedule and Ideas for Stimulating Discussion

Pre-discussion questionnaire - A demographic analysis form is given out to all the 6 participants to be familiar with their age, sex, nationality and occupation. Along with that, a consent form is distributed that states the purpose of study, ground rules of the group discussion and a consent to standby all the conditions mentioned in the form in order to conduct the research.

Visual cues used to stimulate discussion

The visual cues help people understand and remember the complex question(Kruger,2000:60) . For the present research, the technique of Picture Sort is used where the participants are provided with the logos of big brands present in India that construct ad campaigns with celebrities and with no celebrities. Picture sort is a technique used by the moderator to arouse certain characteristics from the sight of the pictures. It is an indirect way of generating unconscious views and opinions that cannot be expressed in words (Kruger, 2000:51).

Online videos of a company showcasing different ad campaigns were used to encourage debate on topics like publicity stunts and choosing a celebrity cautiously.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The focus group lasted for 40 minutes. The age of the participants ranged from 18 year to 23 years. Hence, young Indian adults were well targeted. After a brief introduction of the participants, a consent form and demographic form was handed over (See Appendix). The participants were briefed on the topic to be discussed and the rules of the focus group that were mentioned in the consent form.

Theme 1 and theme 2 were discussed by the first two questions.

Question 1: Why do you think Big Indian corporate hire famous celebrities to promote their brand?

The participants had different viewpoints on this. Some talked about the impact of celebrities on rural India as compared to the urban population. Whereas, few people debated on the impact of famous faces on teenagers and young adults. The buyer's psychology is kept in mind while choosing a celebrity and endorsing a brand. Participant 2 (P2) suggested, "Celebrities are role models to many people. Fans would imitate and do what their role models do. The psychology of such fans are played with while getting the brand endorsed by a celebrity". P6 was of the view that, "age does not play an important role. The fan following influences the buying decision and that is the reason why big corporate hire famous celebrities". Hence, our hypothesis (H1) stands true that a potential consumer might get influenced by a successful brand ambassador to buy the product of a specific brand. Also, Research question I (RI) is answered.

Question 2: Do you get influenced by the ads that you watch on television?

The answer to this was unanimous that at some point of their lives, each one of the participant got influenced by their favourite celebrities doing a commodity's advert. This influenced their buying decision. P5 clearly pointed out that she started consuming Pepsi when her favourite filmstar, Shahrukh Khan started endorsing it. Hence, H1 and H2 stand true.

After the discussion on 2 questions, a handout (see Appendix) was given to the participants in order to write the name of the celebrity that is associated with 10 big brands in India. This was helpful in gaining an insight about the association of brands and celebrities. Most of the participants could associate brands with different brand ambassadors depending upon who made a positive impact on them. This exercise proved HIII true that celebrities have a positive association in the mind of the consumer. It is interesting to notice that all the participants had a positive association of Vodafone's animated character, Zootoo and the puppy that was featured in the company's ads.

Question 3 needed the participants to illustrate the characteristics of a good brand ambassador. This highlighted the theme of a successful celebrity endorser. Participants were intelligent to highlight the importance of what the product is in order to suit a celebrity face to it. P4 rightly pointed out that many consumer products are endorsed by filmstars as they appeal to every age group. P4 added, "Products associated with sports tend to take up sportsmen. Nike and Adidas would not hire filmstars but sports persons". Another viewpoint

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came out when P6 suggested the role of target audience in the choice of the celebrity needed to persuade them to buy the product. P1 further added," Small companies with low budgets tend to make ads featuring common people and with n celebrity ads. These are meaningful ads that highlight the art of ad making". RII was answered in detail.

Hence, there was a lack of evidence as to who makes a popular celebrity endorser. Hence, the HII that filmstars and sportsmen make the famous celebrity endorsers is partially true as many other factors like target audience, budget and type of product are to be considered.

The next question framed was to enquire if the participants thought that the personal lives of the celebrities affect the brand reputation of the company. All the participants agreed unanimously. P4 suggested," I would never buy something that Lance Armstrong would endorse. He has lied once, he may lie again".

Another obvious question that raised the theme of brand loyalty was that do celebrities promote brand loyalty in India? To this various views came to the surface. P6 said, "Celebrities do not promote brand loyalty as much as the quality of the product does. Also, a person who is switching brands of a similar commodity or someone who is a first time consumer would definitely be attracted by the celebrity connection". However, P5 suggested that," Teenagers are most affected by the famous celebrity ads and are pushed to buy the same product". P3 added," Celebrity connection would also help the older generation to buy and give a try to new products as it is often hard for them to remember the catchy names. Therefore, at this time celebrity associations help".

Therefore, HIV partially holds true that celebrities promote brand loyalty. However, the target audience group also should be defined to scrutinise the effect of celebrity endorsements on promoting brand loyalty.

A visual clue that is a publicity stunt involving Akshay Kumar, walking the ramp for Levi's was presented (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECtETCTB5qk>). This is based on publicity stunts that the celebrities indulge in for the brands that they promote. A question is raised for the participants to highlight the last theme as to how well they take publicity stunts like unbuttoning of the jeans in public in India?

To this, P4 said, "I do not find anything wrong in it as a youth of India. Although unbuttoning of the button in public is strictly out of the cultural boundaries in India. However, people especially teenagers and Akshay Kumar fans would go out to buy the same jeans as he had been wearing." P3 thought that it was a great idea because it created media buzz around the country. Therefore, whoever saw the video, saw Levi's. This was a promotion of the brand. Therefore, RIII was answered with this.

Hence HV stands true that publicity stunts do help to gain media attention in the market.

CONCLUSION AND CRITIQUE

Focus group proved to be a quick and an efficient method to collect public opinion on celebrity ad campaigns in India. It provided an insight into the potential customer's mindset. For the present assignment, focus group was highly interactive.

Though, there were few things that could have been avoided. First, the participants deviated from the topic a lot as they gave many instances of various ad campaigns. Second, more visual clues could be used to gain an insight about the chosen themes. Third, most participants talked about teenagers and rural India. A focus group on such target audience can be highly beneficial for the present research.

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I Visual Clue Exercise

From your past experience, who do u associate these brands with -

Choose from any of the three

Name of the celebrity, no celebrity and leave blank for no answer





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