DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF NATIONAL VS. REGIONAL CELEBRITIES ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES

Abstract. *The present study explores the differential effects of having a National/Regional celebrity in an advertisement/ endorsement. More specifically the study intends to find out whether a National celebrity would have a more favorable impact on consumer attitudes than a Regional celebrity when endorsing the same product. Experimental design was used as the research methodology. A 3 (National Celebrity/Regional Celebrity/No Celebrity) X 2 (High/Low Involvement Product) design was conducted on student sample. The experiment was conducted on a total of 240 respondents with fictitious ads as stimuli. National celebrities were found to create more favorable consumer attitudes than regional celebrities. However, the National celebrity was also found to create a more favorable consumer attitude given the product was low involvement. It was interesting to find that the no celebrity treatment created more favorable consumer attitudes than regional celebrity condition. The study suggested that celebrity endorsements were useful but the nature of the product also has an influence on the success. One limitation was the restriction to print advertisements and another was restriction to celebrity of only one region.*

A major implication for the manager is that it is always better to use a National celebrity than a regional one. However, for high involvement products, celebrity endorsement need not be the only success factor. The contribution of the study is in an area which is well researched but addressing a research question which has not been investigated before.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, Consumer Attitudes, Experimental Design, Regional celebrity.

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1. Introduction

A celebrity is a commonly recognized person for his/her achievement and success (Taleja, 2005). A celebrity can be a sports figure, a newscaster, an entertainer, a politician, community leaders or a television/film actor (Bhushan, 2007). Every celebrity, through their performance, creates an impression on society. On this basis people associate different attributes such as trustworthiness, reliability, credibility, likeability, attractive etc. with different celebrities. When such a celebrity endorses a product, the attributes associated with that celebrity is transferred to the product. This has a strong impact consumer's attitude towards brand, their purchase intentions and many other aspects (Erdogan, 1999).

Every region has its own celebrity system. Thus a Celebrity can be broadly classified in three categories: Global celebrity, National Celebrity and Regional Celebrity. A celebrity who is known in more than one country is called global celebrity. Often successful sport stars are global celebrities. National celebrities are those whose recognition is restricted to a particular nation. Generally film stars, politicians etc. are national celebrities. Regional celebrities are well known and appreciated by a particular region of a country but unknown most other parts. In countries like India, where there are many languages and each state has its own culture, regional film personalities play an important role as brand ambassadors. For example in South India, most of the popular brands use south Indian celebrities rather than National ones (Refer to Table 1). Most brands have realized that a mass approach with an assumption that there is a single Indian consumer would not be a viable option given the diversity of India (Bijapurkar, 2007). In such a context, it would be interesting to investigate whether a National Celebrity would have a different effect on consumer attitudes than a Regional Celebrity given the fact that both endorse the same product. The present study explores the differential effects of having a National/Regional celebrity in an advertisement (ad)/endorsement. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section gives a brief review of literature followed by the study objectives. This is followed by the study methodology, analysis and discussion of the results. The papers concludes with the practical implications and future research directions generated from the study.

Table 1

Regional Celebrities used as Brand Ambassadors in India

Brand	Product	National brand ambassa-dor (or for northern belt)	Regional or South India brand ambassador
Fair and Handsome	Fairness Cream for Men	Shahrukh Khan	Surya
Pepsi	Cola	Ranbir Kapoor	Ram Charan Tej, previously Pawan Kalyan

Brand	Product	National brand ambassa-dor (or for northern belt)	Regional or South India brand ambassador
Kurkure	Snack Food	Juhi Chawla	Simran
Navratna Oil	Hair Oil	Amitabh Bachchan	Surya, Mahesh Babu
Tata Indicom	Telecom Service	Kajol	Trisha
Fanta (previous campaign)	Flavored Carbonated Beverage	Rani Mukherjee	Trisha
Perk (previous campaign)	Chocolate Wafer	Preity Zinta	Trisha
Idea Cellular	Telecom Service	Abhishek Bachchan	Siddharth
ThumsUp	Cola	Akshay Kumar	Mahesh Babu, previously Chiranjeevi
Vivel Shampoo	Shampoo	Hrithik Roshan	Trisha
7Up	Flavored Carbonated Beverage	Mallika Sherawat (previously)	Allu Arjun

Source: Celebrity endorsements in South India – the next 'Big thing'. Retrieved 01/06/2010 from http://www.allusirish.in/2010/04/celebrity-brand-ambassador-south-india/

2. Literature Review

Friedman, Termini and Washington (1976) have defined a celebrity as someone, who is, "…known to the public for his accomplishment in areas unrelated to the product class endorsed." (p. 22)

Using a celebrity for endorsement is not a new occurrence but prevalent since 19th century. Celebrity endorsements help to break the clutter and differentiate the brand. It also helps in image repair of a brand (Kaikati, 1987). In today's world where thousands of advertisements come across people in various forms, celebrity endorsement can easily win the confidence of consumers (Sabnavis, 2003). Celebrity helps in increasing profitability of the organization. In fact, celebrity endorsement is more effective than non-celebrity endorsement in generating attitudes towards advertisement (AAD), attitude towards brand (AB) and purchase intention (PI) (Erdogan, 1999).

Research findings suggest that the percentage of celebrity advertisements out of the total number of ads aired is as high as 25-30% in western countries (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995) and around 60% in India (Patel, 2009). In such a scenario both academia and industry look for the issues in selection, use and effectiveness of celebrities as product endorsers. Research in celebrity endorsements in the last thirty years have tried to address various issues in celebrity endorsements such as the effects of credibility of endorser on the consumers (Friedman and Friedman, 1979; Goldsmith et al., 2000), issues in celebrity product 'match-up' (Kamins, 1990; Till and Busler, 1998), meaning transfer in celebrity endorsements (McCracken, 1989) and a host of other issues such as effect of negative celebrity information, cross country comparison of celebrity advertising, gender and celebrity endorsement perceptions, etc.

However, selecting celebrity for the endorsement is not an easy task. Many models such as source credibility model (Maddux and Rogers, 1980: Swartz, 1984; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Ohanian, 1990), source attractiveness model (Baker and Churchill 1977, Kahle and Homer 1985, Caballero, Lumpkin and Madden 1989, Silvera and Austad 2004) etc. has been made to aid in selecting celebrity for endorsement. The source credibility model suggests that the credibility of a celebrity depends on perceived level of trustworthiness, which in turn is affected by likeability. The source attractiveness theory explains that a celebrity is more effective in conveying a message because of status and physical appearance (Erdogan, 1999). Moreover it has been empirically tested that an attractive celebrity would have a more favorable impact on consumer attitudes than an unattractive celebrity (Baker and Churchill 1977, Kahle and Homer 1985, Silvera and Austad 2004).

Further classified, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) argues that for low involvement product, the attractiveness of a celebrity may have a greater impact whereas the message of the advertisement plays higher role for high involvement product (Erdogan, 1999).

This diversity of Indian culture is a major hurdle for any advertisement to be successful all over India. Broadly dividing India is into four Zones with consumer's point of view – North, South, East and West (Gupta, 2006). This diversity along with the regional sub-cultures creates hurdles for using a national celebrity and promotes regional celebrities. Post independence India has accepted many western values but at the same time the core Indian values have been retained strongly by the Indian nationals. The challenge arises when some of these western values directly contradict the traditional values such as gender equality versus male superiority, equality versus hierarchy, belief in technology versus faith in religion, etc. (Shivkumar, 2007).

In many parts of the country a national celebrity is unable to convey the message effectively and convincingly (Rao, 2007), therefore many companies are appointing regional celebrities (Bhushan, 2007). In Southern India, regional celebrity endorsement is very successful (Rao, 2007). The brands have shifted to localized campaigns to penetrate further into these 'regional' markets. Most people in Tier-II and Tier-III in cities of Andhra would not connect to national (more specifically Bollywood) celebrities even if some of them recognize the celebrities. The southern state of Karnataka is the most Bollywood-friendly market, whereas the reach of Hindi movies is lesser in Tamil Nadu and negligible in Kerala. Celebrity endorsements can be a competitive tool in mature, saturated and flooded markets. However, the heterogeneity of the Indian market may prevent the use of a single celebrity across the nation. Therefore in a country like India where heterogeneous people reside, there is a need of further research in the effectiveness of national and regional celebrity. This leads to the study objectives which are discussed in the next section.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Formulation

The source credibility model suggests that a credible source would have a more favorable impact on the consumers than a less credible source. Coupled with it a regional celebrity would be perceived to be more credible in most Indian regions than a national celebrity. The literature on celebrity endorsements are devoid of literature on the comparative effects of a National celebrity vis-à-vis a regional celebrity. A key word search of the words 'regional celebrity' in EBSCO and ABI Inform does not yield a single research paper. The reason behind this may be the uniqueness of India which fosters both national and regional celebrities. The literature on source credibility and the discussion on regional celebrities in India helped us to formulate the first set of hypothesis. The first hypothesis is stated as:

> H1: A Regional Celebrity would have a more favorable impact on consumer attitudes than a National Celebrity when they endorse the same product.

The elaboration likelihood model suggests that the decision making process in case of high involvement products requires more information seeking by the consumers and thus may render celebrity endorsement ineffective. In case of low involvement products the consumer is more affected by non-product related cues. Thus the second hypothesis is stated as:

> H2: The celebrity would have a more favorable impact on consumer attitudes in case of a low involvement product than a high involvement product.

From the literature review on source attractiveness it was noted that an attractive source would create a more favorable impact on the consumer. Thus, given that the celebrity is national or regional, attractiveness would act as a moderating variable affecting the relation between the celebrity and his/her impact on the consumer attitudes. This leads to the third Hypothesis.

> H3: The attractiveness of the celebrity would have a moderating effect on consumer attitudes.

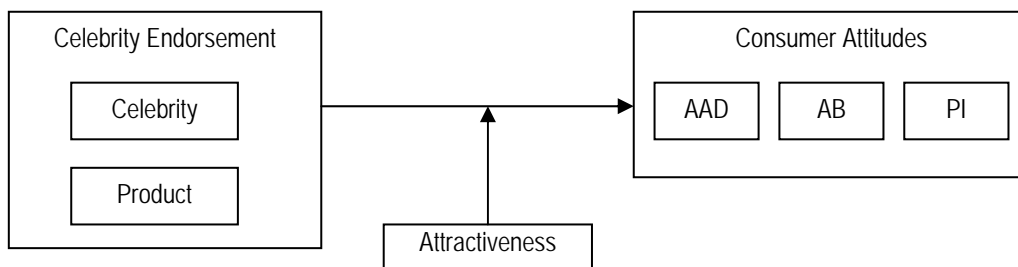The conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Conceptual Model

4. Methodology

Experimental Design was the selected methodology in this research as the study objectives were theory testing and the methodology had literature support. A 3x2 matrix containing two celebrities (national and regional), one control group and two categories of products were considered for study. The two product categories were a) low involvement product (soft drink) and b) high involvement product (car). Thus there were six treatments: National and regional celebrity in low involvement product (2), national and regional celebrity in high involvement product (2), and no celebrity in low and high involvement product (2). The study was conducted on the consumers within the age group of 18 – 45 years.

4.1. Variables and Measures

The independent variables for the study were product (manipulated at two levels: high/low involvement) and celebrity (manipulated at three levels: national/regional/control). The domicile status of the respondent was kept as a control variable. The dependent variables considered were the consumer attitudes, namely, Attitude towards the Ad (AAD), Attitude towards the Brand (AB) and Purchase Intent (PI). The dependent variables (i.e. AAD, AB and PI) were measured using multiple bipolar semantic differential scales adopted from previous research (Friedman and Friedman, 1979; Petty et al., 1983; Freiden, 1984; Kamins, 1990; Ohanian, 1990; Till and Shimp, 1998; Cronley et al., 1999; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty et al., 2002; Stafford et al., 2002; Silvera and Austad, 2004; La Ferle and Choi, 2005). Thus the reliability and validity of the three attitude measurement scales were tested in literature. The covariate attractiveness was measured using a ten item bipolar semantic differential scale where the items were adopted from previous research.

4.2. Pretest

Two pretests were required, (1) to identify the product to be included and (2) to identify the celebrity to be included in the study. To achieve the first one, celebrity advertisements of last three years were studied and two lists were prepared of the ten most endorsed low and high involvement product categories. A group of 60 respondents were given the lists and asked to rank the products which they perceived to be most suited for a celebrity to endorse. Modal ranking suggested that respondents wanted to see celebrity endorsing soft drink (low involvement) and car (high involvement) in advertisement. To achieve pretest objective two, another set of 60 respondents were provided with the selected product (soft drink and car) from pretest 1 along with a list of ten most frequently advertised national and regional celebrities. The respondents were asked to mention their preferred national and regional celebrity for endorsement of each of the two products respectively. Actor Aamir Khan and

Actor/Singer Devang Patel emerged as the most preferred National and Regional Celebrity respectively. Care was taken to ensure that all demographic levels properly were represented among the respondents.

4.3. Treatment

From the pretest results, six treatments were operationalized, with the two identified product categories, two celebrities and one without celebrity. Six print advertisements were prepared with fictitious brand names and punch lines (Refer to Appendix for a sample ad used in the study). Print advertisements were chosen as the treatment, for two reasons. Firstly, it was not possible to create fictitious video advertisements using a celebrity endorser because of cost and production difficulties. Secondly, it was easier to use a print advertisement as a treatment, since it could be easily put in as a supplement in the questionnaire developed to collect responses. Once the print advertisements were prepared, they were shown to three advertising practitioners to check for practicality and whether they looked like real ads. The practitioners were affirmative about the content of the ads and that they looked natural enough.

4.4. Questionnaire Design

In the final study, six separate questionnaires were designed. The basic pattern was same with minor changes according to the treatment. The first page gave a brief idea about a celebrity management group that has roped in a celebrity for endorsement activities, followed by a note about the product brand for which the company has to use a particular celebrity as an endorser. The brief included that the company has come up with an advertisement but was not sure about its impact on the consumer. The second page had questions about the AAD, AB and PI. Further, there were questions to measure the likeability of the celebrity (ten items with 5 point Likert Scales). The last page questions were related to age, gender and domicile status. The control group did not mention about the celebrity management group but that a company wanted to test its ad before going public.

4.5. Sample and Data Collection

A total of 240 respondents (40 per treatment) were selected from colleges, societies, institutes and offices of Ahmedabad city. An equal balance was maintained in the gender ratio and resident status (staying for more/less than 5 years). The male female ratio was 125: 115. Out of the total respondents, 123 were in the age group 18 – 30 and 117 within the age group of 30 – 45.

4.6 The Experiment

The researcher had personally administered the experiment among the respondents. First, brief about the study was given to the respondents. The questionnaires were then distributed along with the print advertisements. The respondents were informed what they were expected to do. Each respondent took about 15 - 20 minutes in observing the advertisement and filling the questionnaire. After the questionnaire was filled, the researcher checked its completeness and made sure that all the criteria necessary for the research were fulfilled. The group was debriefed and the session was concluded.

5. Analysis and Results

Analysis of the data was carried on in two phases. In phase one, MANOVA was run to compare the relative effectiveness of the national and regional celebrities. Phase two had two parts. Phase two started with a factor analysis of the items in the attractiveness scale which was followed by a MANCOVA of the impact of the celebrity endorsement on the consumers including the effect of covariate attractiveness.

5.1. Phase 1

A significant effect of both independent variables Product and Celebrity was observed on the dependent variables (Refer to Table 2). For Celebrity the F statistic was found to be 5.202 (p value 0.000) and for the Product the F value was found to be 4.251 (p value 0.006) at 5% level of significance. However, the interaction effect of Celebrity and Product was not observed to be significant (F stat 1.024, p value 0.409).

Table 2

MANOVA Results: Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value[#]	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	.939	1160.951	3.000	226.000	.000
Product	.053	4.251	3.000	226.000	.006
Celebrity	.129	5.202	6.000	454.000	.000
Product * Celebrity	.026	1.024	6.000	454.000	.409

[#] Value here stands for Pillai's Trace.

Table 3

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Product	AAD	.244	1	.244	.193	.661
	AB	13.395	1	13.395	10.595	.001
	PI	8.514	1	8.514	5.887	.016
Celebrity	AAD	27.514	2	13.757	10.887	.000
	AB	27.301	2	13.651	10.798	.000
	PI	12.727	2	6.363	4.400	.013
Prod * Celeb	AAD	3.985	2	1.993	1.577	.209
	AB	2.406	2	1.203	.952	.388
	PI	1.420	2	.710	.491	.613

On examination of the effects on the respective dependent variables (Table 3), it was observed that the consumer attitudes namely, AAD, AB and PI were positively affected by the presence of the celebrity. The next step was to test for the differences in means created by the levels of the variable Celebrity which was done using Post Hoc Bonferroni Tests. The mean values of AAD for the national celebrity were 2.2 and 1.97 (1 stood for positive on the scale) for soft drink and car respectively and were significantly higher than those of the regional celebrity at 5% level of significance. Similarly, the mean values for were 2.1 and 1.5 for soft drink and car respectively and were significantly higher than those of the regional celebrity at 5% level of significance. One interesting finding was observed while comparing the means. Results suggested that consumers even preferred the ads with no celebrity rather than those with regional celebrity. Regarding the effect of the product on the consumer attitudes, it was observed the effect of Product involvement was significant on AB and PI but not on AAD. Further analysis suggested that the low involvement product (soft drink) generated more favorable and significantly different mean values for AB and PI than that of the high involvement product (car). The Resident status of the respondent was later included in the study as an independent variable but it was not found to have a significant main effect as well as interaction effect on the consumer attitudes.

5.2. Phase 2

Before running Phase 2 of the analysis the data was truncated. The variable values for the control group was removed since it was not associated with the attractiveness factor. Thus the design was reduced to a 2 × 2 (Celebrity: National/Regional × Product: High/Low Involvement) full factorial design. The factor analysis (using principal component analysis) results for the attractiveness items resulted in a single factor which was named Attractiveness. The Attractiveness factor

was composed of the following items: Attractive, cheerful, adventurous, friendly, popular, reliable, trustworthy, unique, creative and believable. The KMO (0.939) and the significant Bartlett Test values validated the presence of a single factor. The total variance explained by the factor attractiveness of national celebrity was 62.51% (Refer to Table 4 for the Component Matrix). The Attractiveness factor was measured using a summated scale of its ten items for the second part of phase 2.

Table 4
Component Matrix of Likability Factor

Items used in Scale	Component Loading Attractiveness
Attractive	.858
Cheerful	.827
Adventurous	.805
Friendly	.794
Popular	.791
Reliable	.790
Trustworthy	.788
Unique	.758
Creative	.748
Believable	.739

The MANOVA results after the inclusion of covariates were similar to that of Phase 1. On examination of the effects on the respective dependent variables (Table 5), it was observed that variable celebrity had a significant impact on all three consumer attitudes namely, AAD, AB and PI. Moreover, the Covariate Attractiveness was found to have a significant effect on the AAD only at 5% level of significance. The effect of variable Product on AAD was not significant and the effect on PI was significant at 10% level of significance. The latter was a new finding from phase 2. Product was found to have a significant effect on only the AB at 5% level of significance. The product-celebrity interaction term was not found to have an insignificant effect on any of the dependent variables, a finding which was the repetition of that of phase 1.

Table 5
MANOVA Results: Effects after Inclusion of Covariate Attractiveness

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Likeability	AAD	12.645	1	12.645	10.907	.001
	AB	1.637	1	1.637	1.185	.278
	PI	.238	1	.238	.180	.672
Product	AAD	.963	1	.963	.830	.364
	AB	6.908	1	6.908	5.001	.027
	PI	3.868	1	3.868	2.921	.089

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Celebrity	AAD	24.362	1	24.362	21.015	.000
	AB	24.014	1	24.014	17.386	.000
	PI	10.273	1	10.273	7.759	.006
Prod * Celeb	AAD	2.430	1	2.430	2.096	.150
	AB	.049	1	.049	.036	.851
	PI	1.039	1	1.039	.785	.377

6. Discussion

The most important finding of the study is that celebrity endorsement is effective for marketing communication. This supports the literature on celebrity endorsement (eg. Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Ohanian, 1990; La Ferle and Choi, 2005). Secondly, the study found a national celebrity to be more effective in creating positive consumer attitudes than a regional celebrity irrespective of the product category. Even though this may sound obvious, it contradicts the recent practice of using regional celebrities to promote national brands. Thus Hypothesis 1 was rejected. The study also supported the Elaboration Likelihood Model suggested by Erdogan (1999) since the study found celebrity endorsement to be more effective for low involvement products than high involvement ones. Thus Hypothesis 2 was supported. The evidence of a significant effect of the covariate attractiveness on AAD may suggest that the consumers' attention is more on an ad when the celebrity is attractive and this leads to a more favorable AAD. Thus Hypothesis was partially supported. This finding supports the literature on source credibility (Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Ohanian, 1990; Lafferty et al., 2002). The other interesting finding is the insignificant effect of the product on AAD. This finding implies that the consumers are more influenced by non product related cues when they form attitude towards an advertisement and whether the product is a high or low involvement one may not matter. This actually supports the previous finding of why celebrity attractiveness had a significant effect on AAD.

7. Implications and Conclusion

The major implication of the study points out to the fact that National Celebrities are better than regional celebrities in creating positive consumer attitudes. Consumers are open to new product in high and low involvement product categories with the presence of national and regional celebrity. However, when compared within the product categories, it had a higher impact on low involvement product (soft drink) as compared to the high involvement product (car). The results of the study also contradict the cultural proximity theory as the permanent residents of the city where the study was conducted were not found to have a favorable impact of regional

celebrity. This implies that consumers have developed wider prospective in terms of celebrity endorsed products. The scope of the study could be an interesting extension where comparison between the effects of a National and International celebrity could be explored. A replication study could also be conducted across different region in India which would explore possible regional variances. This would be particularly important in the Indian context since different regions have different levels of attachment with their regional celebrities. Overall the findings from this study have challenged a long standing practice of using regional celebrities in advertisements in India and have given the practitioners a new way of rethinking the practice.

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Appendix

Sample Advertisement