Measuring the Celebrity Role Model Influence on Brand Equity

A Study in Indian Context

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Abstract

The current research aims to examine the impact of celebrity role model influence on the brand equity dimensions in the context of celebrity endorsed products. Quota sampling method was used to ensure that the sample was representative of population census data. The sample consisted of 118 males and 106 females which are in accordance with population data. The age profile of the respondents ranged from 21-25 years and approximately an equal number of respondents (112) were selected from each of the two selected cities (Amritsar and Ludhiana) of a northern province in India. Mall intercept interviews were conducted in the two famous malls of each selected city to obtain information from the respondents. The results of path analysis revealed that celebrity role model influence had a positive effect on all four dimensions of brand equity, namely, brand associations, brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality. The results imply significant implication for academicians and marketing practitioners. This study adds to the literature of celebrity endorsement and brand equity by examining the celebrity role model influence and brand equity relationship and the role of socialization

in framing those relationships. The marketers can understand the impact of these celebrities as a role model and consider utilizing them as an influencer in their marketing campaigns across different media platforms.

Keywords: *Celebrity Role Model Influence, Brand Equity, India*

INTRODUCTION

In India, celebrities are worshipped as demi-gods. Celebrities have attained a special status in the society owing to their exceptional professional performances. These professional performances put them into media limelight and encourage marketers to select them as an endorser for their brands. The celebrities have been as a role model for decades and with the increase in social media platforms, it appears that famous and infamous celebrities are everywhere (Jones and Schumann, 2000). The advertisers are making use of the celebrity's popularity by hiring them as endorsers for the brands. It is a common phenomenon that celebrities such as, movie stars and sport stars are being used as brand endorsers. Considering the high cost involved in this process, it is imperative for marketing practitioners to establishing a relationship between celebrity role model influence and brand equity to justify the huge expenses.

With the process of celebrity endorsement, advertisers instil a brand with desirable associations (Keller, 2013; Till, 1998), with the expectation of developing positive brand equity. Previous research shows that the relationship between the celebrity role model influence and brand equity has been overlooked. Celebrities are considered as epithet of personality and lifestyle related associations (McCracken, 1989). These associations make consumers to follow the life of these celebrities and sometimes, it may lead them to follow them as role model. Further, McCracken (1989) states that consumers assess the symbolic meaning linked with celebrities and utilize these meanings, in part, to develop an individual sense of self. Despite the theoretical understanding of celebrities as role model and their potential impact on brand endorsement process, empirical investigation into these relationships have been ignored. There is lack of research on the role of celebrities as role model influence on the target market. It is a huge question mark for the advertisers that whether or not the celebrities add value to the endorsed brand. In this context, Miciak and Shanklin (1994) stated that only one out of five celebrity endorsements meet the strategic expectations of the advertisers. Sukhdial et al. (2002) have found that celebrity endorsers may not have connected with the target market. However, the previous researchers have not examined the influence of celebrity endorsers as role model for the target market. If they do act as role model for the target market then the next question would be to examine their role model influence on the endorsed brand equity. Hence, the objective of the current research is to examine the celebrity role model influence on the brand equity dimensions.

The current study is conducted in Indian setting owing to the fact that celebrity endorsements are used in around 60% of advertisements in India (Shashidhar, 2008). India is known to be a Star-struck nation where celebrities enjoy an extra special status (Jain, 2011). India is an up-and-coming leading nation in the global backdrop from the eastern part of the globe (Friedman, 2005). Biswas et al. (2009) confer that Indian has a collectivistic culture which symbolises

high power distance and collectivistic values and in such a culture, consumers are impacted greatly by the social status and attractiveness of the celebrity. Considering the fact that celebrities are worshipped, the research comprises of Gen Y consumers aged between 21-25 years. They are considered to be the most affected consumers segment by the process of celebrity endorsement. The next section of the study deals with the conceptual framework of the study which leads to development of hypotheses. It is followed by methodology and data analysis. Data analysis leads to the results of the study which have discussed further and leads to academic and managerial implication of the study. Finally, we state the limitations of the study and scope for future studies.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The youth market is one of the important markets for the marketers as they have higher spending power, ability to set the trends, receptive to new products and have large potential to be lifelong consumers of the product (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001). Previous researchers (Kapner, 1997; Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001) have also emphasized that Gen Y is the resistant to the marketing efforts. However, other group of researchers argue that this segment of market is easier to target because they have been brought up in the consumer oriented society. Manning-Schaffel (2002) contends that Gen Y is less entrenched in traditional values and ethics. They can be easily targeted owing to fact that they have grown in the world of consumerism. The member of Gen Y group symbolizes a feasible group to be the studied in terms of media influences.

Consumer socialization is the process by which 'young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace' (Ward, 1974, p. 1). Consumer socialization highlights various sources of influence or 'socialization agents' that broadcast norms, attitudes, motivations, and behaviours to the learner. A socialization agent could be any person or organization directly related with the individual. The most common socialization agents used in the literature comprises of parents, peers, mass media, school, and television viewing. The notion of consumer socialization has been employed to establish how consumers learn thought processes and consumption behaviours through modelling (Moschis and Churchill, 1978).

A consumer can consider anyone as a role model with whom they may come in contact and who can influence their consumption behaviours (Bandura, 1977). Previous research has also been conducted on the impact of role model with whom consumers have little or no contact. Lockwood and Kunda (1997) confer that individuals with excellent professional achievements can also serve as role model for others. They can encourage others to cultivate certain self images and adopt lifestyle related behaviour. In this regard, Bush et al. (2004) studied the impact of sports athletes as role models on teenagers' behavioural intentions. They found that sports athletes as role models have positive impact on adolescent's word of mouth and brand loyalty. Celebrities are vicarious role models as also reiterated by the work of Bandura (1986).

Previous research has examined the impact of the celebrity endorsers on the variety of the dependent variables, such as, purchase intentions (Paul and Bhakar, 2018), brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2015), attitude towards

brand (Goldsmith et al., 2000) and attitude towards advertisement (Till and Busler, 2000), sales (Elberse and Verleun, 2012) and financial performance of the brand (Kamkura, 1995). Previous research states that superstars have been used to determine their impact on self views of young adults (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). The major take away from the previous research is that vicarious role models can be agents of socialization and can have vital impact on the professional goal, educational selection, and the self-views of young consumers. However, the research of celebrity as role model influence on consumer based brand equity has been under researched.

Brand equity is defined as the 'incremental value added by a brand name on to a product' (Farquhar, 1989). The generally acknowledged conceptualisation of brand equity from a consumer perspective has been given by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Aaker (1991, p. 16) operationalised brand equity 'as a set of assets (or liabilities) consisting of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other proprietary assets'. On the other hand, Keller (1993, p. 2) referred to brand equity as customer-based brand equity and defined it as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand'.

From a the point of view of a consumer, Aaker's (1991) first four dimensions of brand equity (i.e. brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty) are deemed to be pivotal (Yoo et al., 2000). Further, Yoo and Donthu (2002) coined the term consumer-based brand equity which refers to the set of these four brand equity dimensions. Aaker (1991) states that brand awareness is considered as the power of a brand's occurrence in the memory of consumer. Brand awareness is an essential state

for brand equity, without which consumers will be devoid of other equity dimensions (Pappu and Quester, 2006). Brand awareness consists of brand recall and brand recognition whereas brand associations refer to the various meanings related to a brand (Keller, 1993). Zeithaml (1988) refers to perceived quality as the consumer's subjective evaluation of brand. Lastly, brand loyalty is defined as "the propensity to be loyal to a focal brand, which is evidenced by the intention to purchase that brand as a primary choice" (Yoo and Donthu, 2002). The current research focuses on these four dimensions of brand equity.

Atkin and Block (1983) state that celebrity endorsers are considered as influential because they are seen as attractive and likable individuals. The celebrities can add value to the endorsement process due to combination of their good looks and status (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). Further, McCracken (1989) meaning transfer model states that celebrities can transmit cultural meaning from them to the endorsed product. However, these conceptual frameworks pave way for the better understanding of the celebrity endorsers and have added a new element to the body of existing literature on the celebrity endorsement but none of the current literature has assessed the influence of celebrity endorsement on Gen Y consumers. Thus, consumer socialization can be used to form theoretical underpinning of the study that can provide a setting to evaluate the impact of vicarious role models such as, a celebrity would have on Gen Y consumers. Therefore, it is assumed that celebrity endorser will act as a socialization agent in Gen Y consumers' socialization process.

Bandura (1986) states that the vicarious role model such as movie stars and sport stars influence adolescent behaviour. Additionally,

Martin and Bush (2000) recommended the vicarious role models such as movie stars and sport stars can be significant influencers of consumer lifestyles and consumption patterns. Based on these result, we anticipate celebrities as role model to positively impact endorsed consumer based brand equity. Hence, it serves as a significant foundation for the development of following hypotheses:

- H1: Celebrity role model influence will positively relate to brand associations.
- H2: Celebrity role model influence will positively relate to brand awareness.
- H3: Celebrity role model influence will positively relate to brand loyalty.
- H4: Celebrity role model influence will positively relate to perceived brand quality.

METHOD

The respondents were asked about their favourite celebrity and the brand endorsed by them (Singh and Banerjee, 2018). Only those respondents who correctly answered the celebrity-brand combinations were further asked to fill the questionnaires of the study. The initial sample of the study consisted of 250 respondents. However, some of the questionnaires were deleted owing to more than 30% missing answers and thereby, resulting in use of 224 complete questionnaires for the study. Quota sampling method was used to ensure that the sample was representative of population census data. The sample consisted of 118 (52.67%) males and 106 (47.32%) females which are in accordance with population data. The age profile of the respondents ranged from 21-25 years and approximately an equal number of respondents (112) were selected from each of the two selected cities (Amritsar and Ludhiana) of a northern province in India. Mall intercept interviews were conducted in the two famous malls of each selected city to obtain information from the respondents.

MEASUREMENTS

The survey items were adapted from various studies and measured on a five point Likert scale. As shown in Table 1, the survey items consisted of two major constructs, namely, celebrity role model influence and brand equity which have been explained as follows:

Celebrity Role Model Influence

We measured celebrity role model influence by using items borrowed from Rich (1997) scale and Bush et al. (2004). It comprised of five items for measuring celebrity role model influence on a 5 point Likert scale. The scale displayed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$).

Brand Equity

We measured brand equity by using fourteen items adapted from Pappu et al. (2005, 2006) and Spry et al. (2011). It consists of four dimensions, namely, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. The item pertaining to brand loyalty 'The brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity is usually my first choice.' and brand association 'I have no difficulty in imagining the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity in my mind' had a factor loading of less than 0.50 and therefore, they were eliminated for further analysis. Finally, the brand equity scale consisted of three items for measuring brand awareness ($\alpha = 0.75$), two items for brand loyalty ($\alpha = 0.73$), three items for brand associations ($\alpha = 0.75$), and four items for perceived quality ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Constructs		Statements	CFA Factor Loadings
Celebrity Role Model Influence		My favourite celebrity provides a good model for me to follow.	0.78
		My favourite celebrity leads by example.	0.74
		My favourite celebrity sets a positive example for others to follow.	0.81
		My favourite celebrity exhibits the kind of work ethic and behaviour that I try to imitate.	0.76
		My favourite celebrity acts as a role model for me.	0.70
Brand Equity (BE)	Brand Awareness (BA)	I can recognize the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity.	0.64
		I am aware of the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity.	0.79
		Some characteristics of the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity come to mind quickly.	0.70
	Brand Loyalty (BL)	I feel loyal to the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity.	0.75
		I would not buy any other brand of the product if the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity was available at the store.	0.76
	Brand Associations (BAS)	I like the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity	0.80
		I trust the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity.	0.87
		I would feel proud to own the brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity.	0.60
	Perceived Quality (PQ)	The brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity is very reliable.	0.86
		The brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity is of very high quality.	0.77
		The brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity offers excellent features.	0.63
		The brand endorsed by my favourite celebrity is of very consistent quality.	0.60

RESULTS

Scale Evaluations

In order to examine the problem of common method bias, we conducted Harman single factor test (Chung and Cho, 2017). The results of exploratory factor analysis illustrated that first factor depicted 26.80% variance out of the total variance of 68.98% suggesting that there is no issue of common method biasness. Further, the measurement model consisting of items representing five first order factors was assessed. The modification fit indices revealed acceptable fit for our model: CMIN/df = 172.76/109 (1.59), NFI = 0.88, IFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05. The values of the model are acceptable as the values of CFI are greater than 0.90 and less than 0.08 for RMSEA (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The other values of NFI, IFI, TLI are also acceptable limits as they are greater than 0.85 as suggested by the work of Mann and

Table 2: Psychometric Properties of the Constructs of the Study

Constructs	Mean	S.D.	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
BAS	3.12	1.08	0.80	0.58	0.76				
RM	3.37	1.01	0.87	0.57	0.33	0.76			
BA	3.22	1.05	0.75	0.51	0.31	0.17	0.71		
PQ	3.30	1.08	0.81	0.52	0.19	0.34	-0.07	0.72	
BL	3.06	1.09	0.73	0.57	0.35	0.30	0.14	0.38	0.76

Note: S.D. refers to standard deviations; C.R. refers to composite reliability; AVE refers to average variance extracted; the diagonal values (in bold from columns labelled 1 to 5) are square root of AVE and the values in the lower half of the matrix are the Phi-coefficients between the constructs.

Ghuman (2014). The CFA (Confirmatory factor analysis) factor loadings were within acceptable limits as the loading of all the items were equal to or greater than 0.60. The results of reliability analysis revealed that all the constructs displayed good reliability as the value of Cronbach alpha exceeded 0.70 as suggested by Hair et al. (2006). The validity of the constructs was also computed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 highlights the psychometric properties of the constructs used for the data analysis. It also demonstrated that all the latent variables of the study had a good convergent validity as their Cronbach alpha value exceeded the acceptable limit of 0.70 and AVE (Average variance extracted) value exceeded the acceptable limit of 0.50. Convergent validity is accomplished owing to the significant and considerable factor loadings of the measurement items which shows that AVE were greater than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2006). All construct pairs in the model were examined for discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) strict standard. All the variance extracted (AVE) estimates are greater than the corresponding inter constructs squared correlation estimates. The first order constructs of the study also showed good discriminant validity as the square roots of AVE values were larger than the factor correlation coefficients.

The hypotheses of the study ranging from H1 to H4 were tested using path analysis. The result revealed that celebrity role model influence is positively related to brand associations (β = 0.18, t = 2.15, p < 0.05) and resulting in acceptance of H1. The celebrity role model influence is positively related to brand awareness (β = 0.35, t = 4.41, p < 0.001) and leads to acceptance of H2. The results also showed that celebrity role model influence is positively related to brand loyalty (β = 0.33, t = 3.70, p < 0.001) and enabling acceptance of H4. It also illustrated that celebrity role model influence (β = 0.35, t = 4.54, p < .001) had a positive direct association with perceived quality. Hence, H4 is supported.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current research states that celebrity role model positively influences dimensions of brand equity, namely, brand associations, brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived brand quality. This suggests that consumers considers celebrities as their role model and this role model influence enables them to make brand choices and discuss positive things about a brand as

also reiterated by the work of Bush et al. (2004).

The first finding of the study states that celebrity role model influences brand associations. It states that when a celebrity endorses a brand, their status as a role model enables them to add positive associations to endorsed brand. These results are consistent with work of McCracken (1989), Till (1998) and Batra and Homer (2004) who exhibited the transmission of celebrity personality attributes from the celebrity to the brand.

The results also show that celebrity's role model positively influence brand awareness. The reason for such finding could be the fact that there is a situation of high power distance in India and consumers do considers celebrities as their idols and sometimes, worship them. These results are consistent with the work of Silvera and Austad (2004) who suggest that consumers admire celebrities owing to their powerful influence as role models which garner eye balls towards the endorsed product. Therefore, celebrities being widely recognised individuals use their popularity to add to the awareness of the endorsed brands.

The results reveal that celebrity role model positively affects brand loyalty. It is consistent with the work of Bush et al. (2004) who also found similar impact but their study was conducted using adolescent teens. This study establishes the generalizabilty of the results by using a larger base of consumer segments. The rationale behind celebrity impacting brand loyalty could be that consumers experience stronger emotions with celebrities. These results are in accordance with the work of Dix et al. (2010) who also found similar relationship between the celebrities as role models and brand loyalty.

Further, the findings demonstrate that when the celebrity endorses a brand, these emotions get transferred to the brand and it encourages consumer to stay loyal with endorsed brand. The results also illustrate that celebrity endorsement enhances the perceived quality of the brand and is correlated with intention to use the brand as is also reiterated by Kamins et al. (1989), Ohanian (1991) and Chan et al. (2013). Similar relationship has also been observed by Spry et al. (2011) when they examined the impact of celebrity's credibility on the consumer-based brand equity. The findings reveal that the status of celebrities as a role model establishes positive relationship with endorsed brand quality. The agents of socialization enable consumers to evaluate the quality of the endorsed brand positively.

ACADEMIC AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This research offers key implications for academicians and marketers. From an academic point of view, this is one of the pioneering studies in the field of celebrity endorsers which studies their impact from a role model point of view. This study adds to the literature of celebrity endorsement and brand equity by examining their relationship and the role of socialization in framing those relationships.

This research also provides marketing practitioners with significant inferences which can be drawn from the results of the study. The marketers must understand the impact of these celebrities as a role model and consider utilizing them as a influencer in their marketing campaigns across different media platforms. The marketers must also ensure that consumers consider a celebrity as their role model which may further enhance endorsed brand equity. It may also equip marketers with certain better decision making

skills required for selection of appropriate endorser for their brand.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current research suffers from few limitations. First, the research was conducted using on Indian consumer only. Future research must be carried out on consumers from different cultures and sub-cultures. Second, this research uses a fictitious brand name for the study. Future research must use real brands to enhance the generalisability of the study. Third, this research does not make comparison between the consumer demographic variables, such as, gender, income, occupation etc. Fourth, this research does not take into account the role of digital influencers for the study. Future researcher may dwell upon it.

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