
Celebrities as Brand Ambassadors

Prashant S. Khande

ABSTRACT

Successful branding mostly depends on the Brand Ambassador in this highly competitive world of goods and services marketing. In fact it is one of the best Intellectual properties a company can possess and thus ensure for itself sustained profitability and growth rate. So much literature have been written on Brand Ambassador Creation and management, which often lead to confusion and diffusion of understanding the simple facts about Brands. This article attempts to touch upon crucial concepts behind celebrities as BRAND AMBASSADORS and their effectiveness.

Telecom major Bharti Televentures announced batting maestro Sachin Tendulkar as its new brand ambassador besides unveiling a brand campaign — Express Yourself — for its mobile service brand AirTel. "Sachin and AirTel both are leaders having similar values and personality traits like trustworthiness, friendliness, youthfulness and trend-setters," Manoj Kohli, president (mobility), Bharti Televentures, said in New Delhi.

Brand ambassadors are required for specific brands. May be Shahrukh is not required for Santro because he may never use the product but Sachin Tendulkar or Leander Paes are definitely effective for a brand like Adidas, because they believe in the product and hence use it with conviction. It is important to remember that brand ambassadors are usually for the local market. US Teen Idol Kobe Bryant, successor to Michael Jordan, is relatively unknown in India. Similarly, Indian icon, Sachin Tendulkar is unknown in countries like the USA and Germany.

It is as simple as common sense that brand ambassadors play an important role for effective advertisement. The Celebrity as a brand ambassador should be focused, should convey a promise and deliver it over a long period of time, should reflect target market's cultural and lifestyle values, should have excellent yet SIMPLE communication of core benefit and brand should smoothly merge into daily lifestyle of the consumers and not try to alter it.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the overall perceptions of Indian consumers towards advertising by celebrities as brand ambassador, and the influence of celebrity advertising towards customer purchasing behavior. The results showed that now a days most of the companies are thinking to take celebrities as brand ambassadors. Overall, all agreed

that advertising by celebrities as brand ambassadors influenced them in making decisions to purchase a product.

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Kamins (1989) defined a celebrity as an individual who is known to the public for his/her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed.

The modern world depends on advertising. Without it, producers and distributors would be unable to sell; buyers would not know about new products and would continue to remember obsolete products or services, and the modern industrial world would collapse. If factory output is to be maintained profitably, advertising must be powerful and continuous. Mass production requires mass consumption, which in turn requires advertising to the mass market through the mass media and so the role of the celebrities as brand ambassadors has great importance.

BRAND PERSONALITY: -

It takes image characteristics of a brand and renders them in human terms as seen by the consumer. Brand is thought as being friendly, boring, funny, rude, caring, stylish etc. Consumers need to think of brands in human terms. Memorability of a brand personality comes through consistency and other props. Brand personality should not be confused with the description of target audience. The gap between these two is filled by aspirations that are sought to be addressed by the brand, e.g., the Dettol soap user is hygiene-conscious but the brand ambassador is that of a person who is fastidious, clean and sensible person.

Brands are much like people, they have certain physical characteristics (how they look and sound); certain skills and abilities (what they can do and how they perform), and certain associations and attitudes. Like an individual, a brand too is a blend of all these. The brand therefore, appeals to senses, to reason and to emotions. For the consumer to be at home with the brand, he/she must be comfortable with its personality. Brand personality must be consistent over a period of time.

If we look around, we find hundreds of examples. The Marlboro Cigarette gave birth to the Marlboro man - the ultimate specimen of manhood from the Marlboro country. Camel brand's Camel Cartoon Mnemonic has captured such a strong "I am cool" personality that in US children recognize this

cartoon far more than even Mickey Mouse.

Also look at the personalities of our local brands; the strong associations of Liril, personified by Kren Lundl with the effervescent image of the water nymph; that of Rasna with the lovable child offering her tired daddy Rasna and that of Onida evoking the hidden devil in us or Lalitaji insisting that it makes better sense to buy Surf because of good logic developed on her own.

SELECTION OF CELEBRITIES AS A BRAND AMBASSADOR: -

Brand ambassadors are required for specific brands. May be ShahRukh is not required for Santro because he may never use the product but Sachin Tendulkar or Leander Paes are definitely effective for a brand like Adidas, because they believe in the product and hence use it with conviction. It is important to remember that brand ambassadors are usually for the local market. US Teen Idol Kobe Bryant, successor to Michael Jordan, is relatively unknown in India. Similarly, Indian Icon, Sachin Tendulkar is unknown in countries like the USA and Germany.

The primary responsibility of the brand manager is to ensure that there is a 'fit' between the company values and the values that the brand ambassador brings. The brand ambassador at no point in time can be bigger than the brand. He/she has to be dissolved in the brand and therefore complement the brand. Also appointing a brand ambassador must help achieve certain objectives. In the case of Adidas, the primary objective is to promote its products amongst the sports enthusiasts and sports persons. Another critical aspect is the clarification on escape clause. When Indian newspapers reported about Hansie Cronje's involvement in match fixing, Adidas authorities in South Africa immediately suspended their contract with Hansie. Subsequently the contract was cancelled after his involvement was established. Longevity of association is very crucial for brand ambassadors to get acquainted with the intricacies of the brand and more importantly for the brands to derive value out of it. The minimum duration of association should be five years.

A general consensus inside the company about using a particular celebrity accompanied by a well

thought out and clear-cut strategy on how to use the celebrity is imperative since a large amount of money is spent in signing these ambassadors.

EMAMI, the 300 crore plus cosmetic giant has roped in Madhuri Dixit Nene to be the brand ambassador for their beauty products range. The promotions are already on air and it seems that Madhuri has agreed upon the offer. The more interesting part is that she is not just the brand ambassador, she is also interacting with the research and development center very closely for the development of the 'Madhuri-Emami' line of herbal, personal and healthcare products. The Emami herbal skincare products are called 'Beauty Secrets by Madhuri'. The maiden range of 'Madhuri-Emami' products includes moisturizer, lotion, hair oil, and shampoo. The other products in the offing are colour cosmetics and dental care products. Furthermore the company is planning for a foreign tie-up to manufacture the 'Madhuri-Emami' line of products.

TWO-wheeler major Kinetic has roped in Kapil Dev as its brand ambassador for the next two years. He will be primarily involved in the promotion of the new volume driver 100cc bike kinetic boss.

Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai is the new brand ambassador of L'Oreal Paris, the flagship brand of the L'Oreal group, reports UNI. The actress will represent L'Oreal's products for skin care, hair colour, and other cosmetics.

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Even though Katrina Kaif's Bollywood career has yet to take off, the stunning model-turned-actress has decided to play the brand ambassador to the internationally known Estelle jewellery. Katrina was the cynosure of many eyes at the recently held Taj Ballroom in which she was named the face of Estelle,

the versatile woman of the new millennium. And now it is learnt that Katrina will endorse Estelle's products and will feature in the company's forthcoming advertising campaign. She will also participate in all the brand events of the company.

Becoming Brand Ambassador is gaining a new momentum. Today, **Shahrukh** and **Aamir** are the highest paid ambassadors (Rs. 2.5 - 4 crore), but the **Big B** is soon going to out do them. Following contracts with **Reid and Taylor, ICICI, Nerolac Paints, PepsiCo** and **Parker Pens, Amitabh** has also become the brand ambassador for **Dabur Chyawanprash**. Dabur relaunched their chyawanprash with a new packaging in the 250 crore-chyawanprash market. **Aamir** and **Shahrukh** may be today's superstars, but they have a long way to go before they can catch up with yesteryears' superstar, Amitabh.

Why do marketers select these celebrities' as brand ambassador to endorse their brand?

The choice of the celebrity as a brand ambassador is critical. The celebrity should have high recognition, high positive effect, and high appropriateness to the brand. People have faith on Sachin and Amitabh. In the same way, Aishwarya, Madhuri and Katrina are known as beauty queens in the film industry, so their selection as brand ambassadors for cosmetics products is exactly right strategy.

One of marketer's main worries is that its celebrity endorsers will get caught in a scandal or embarrassing situation. Football hero O.J.Simpson pitched Hertz rental cars for 20 years until he was charged with murdering his wife in 1994. Pepsi dropped Michael Jackson in the wake of child molestation charges. Same is the case with Salman Khan.

ICICI AND AMITABH AS A BRAND AMBASSADOR

I would like to explain the case of ICICI and Amitabh as a brand ambassador.

When it is pointed out that "safety bonds" send the wrong message to investors, various

bureaucrats at the finance ministry have argued that ICICI is a private company and its investors are aware of the risk involved. My answer is to quote from the business plan of Mecklai. Assessing ICICI as a potential competitor in his business segment, Jamal Mecklai's plan says: "It will be difficult for them to cannibalise their existing businesses substantially, particularly since they remain majority government owned and, as such, carry certain 'social obligations'." If that were not enough, he believes that ICICI is "pushing for ways to dilute government control". In fact, FIIs, NRIs and GDR holders own half its equity.

If Jamal Mecklai, a highly reputed Forex and commodity expert who is in the thick of the financial market, can be so wrong, then it is stupid to assume that millions of retail investors are better informed. ICICI is indeed perceived as a government-owned financial institution and is treated as such even by SEBI. No private finance company would have been allowed to brand its bonds as "safety bonds" without inviting the objections of the regulator. ICICI has now moved beyond bonds, it has broken fresh ground by appointing cine star Amitabh Bachchan as its brand ambassador for a hefty fee of Rs 10 crore.

Amitabh is indeed a powerful icon and in his new avatar as the magnet for India's most successful television show *Kaun Banega Crorepati* his credibility is far higher than it was as a superstar actor. To sign on the mighty Bachchan was indeed a coup for ICICI, but it is important that SEBI and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) do some quick thinking about the implications of brand ambassadors for financial products and imposing conditions on the products endorsed and the message that they convey.

A brand ambassador could probably promote a housing loan or consumer finance product but when he promotes a financial instrument he assumes the role of a financial advisor. Finance companies, or for that matter any company, cannot simply cash in on the credibility of a celebrity image without the responsibility that comes with it. And Amitabh plays his role in nice manner.

STRATEGY BEHIND SELECTION

Advertisers often select celebrity as a brand ambassador as a promotional strategy to communicate

the attributes of their product or brand. In the United States, it was reported that about 20% of all television commercials feature a famous person, and about 10% of the dollars spent on television advertising are used in celebrity endorsement advertisements (Advertising Age, 1987; Sherman, 1985). Thus, celebrity endorsement as brand ambassador has become a prevalent form of advertising in United States and elsewhere.

A celebrity is also chosen based on his/her credibility. Highly credible endorsers are expected to produce more positive attitude changes towards the position advocated and to induce more behavioral changes than less credible sources. Someone who is well known, attractive, trustworthy, an expert or even a combination of some or all of these traits would be highly credible.

Shahrukh Khan, the heartthrob of Indian cinema, and Sachin Tendulkar, considered by many as the best batsman in world cricket, do a lot to reinforce the young, successful image that the brand is trying to project. If the idea is to make Pepsi appeal to the young at heart who would like to identify them as successful, then the choice of brand icons is appropriate. The image of the heartthrob of the masses and the champion of the most popular sport in India rub off strongly on the brand.

Among soaps, Lux has a distinctive brand personality- soft, smooth tender and caring. Promoted as it is by the film star who is the current rage, it comes with a testimonial that is hard to ignore: the seductive dream woman of Technicolor and 70 mm, swearing that it is Lux that keeps her skin gentle and silky smooth. Since every woman's dream is to have skin like that, the lure of Lux is strong. It is the stuff that fantasy is made of. It is a complete beauty care package- all in a cake of soap.

In both instances, the brand ambassador of Pepsi and Lux help identify the brand from a mile away. Both stand head and shoulders above the competition in their categories. Lux's personality is one of being the beauty soap of film stars and Pepsi's of being tomorrow's cola.

In brand building, being specific and focused helps build a unique brand ambassador. Generalizations

are of no help at all.

As the competition increased multifold, the advertisers began to use celebrities as a brand ambassador in their advertisements to persuade the customers to use their brands. Though Hindustan Lever used many film actresses like Zeenat Aman, Hema Malini, Rekha, Parvin Bobby, Sridevi, Dimple Kapadia, Madhuri Dixit, Juhi Chawla and others for promoting their brand Lux for the last 25 years but the use of celebrities increased in leaps and bounds as the competition increased multifold. Today almost all leading stars from the world of cinema and cricket are being used to endorse various products. Basic purpose of using celebrities is that the people will look like celebrity if they use that particular brand advertised by the celebrity. The nineties witnessed an Explosion in celebrity advertising in India but too much use of celebrities will lose its shine while selective use of celebrities and minimal brand exposure only will retain its luster.

Take the consumer's point of view. Ask yourself what the consumer is really buying. Is he or she really buying the product because of its functional benefits? How important are the psychological benefits? The corporate landscape is littered with examples of companies and industries that failed to appreciate what their consumers were really purchasing. Because of this, they defined their markets inappropriately and often disastrously. Begin with an analysis of how people behave rather than an analysis of how they feel or what they believe. You will probably get into these issues, but behavior is the foundation from which you build. And, above all, try to see the world with the consumer's eyes.

BENCHMARKS TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL BRAND AMBASSADOR

Before going to become brand ambassador of any brand, brand ambassador must understand the brand values and validation that the organization and consumer place on the brand.

Every contact with your company is a microcosm of its brand in the mind of customers, whether it's a call to tech support, a visit to the Web site, programming and using a product, reading an owner's manual, shopping in a retail store or seeing a commercial on TV. Each of these brand touch points

should and could consistently speak the same message, and create memorable, positive experiences for your customers. Instead of just measuring how loudly companies scream in their attempts to stand out from the cacophony of commercial messages, a new brand scorecard needs to be developed, and one key measure must address how well your brand ambassadors deliver your message. MORI, a major UK research firm, found that "how staff treated you" was a key factor in customer loyalty, and in doing so confirmed the crucial role of brand ambassadors. The MORI research team conducted face-to-face interviews with over 1,000 people in April 2000. They identified 12 brand ambassador benchmarks (listed below). The more of these criteria that were achieved by a company, the greater the degree of loyalty established with the customer. Gone are the days (if they ever existed) when brands were created through the traditional "branding" activities of colorful logos and witty tag lines, creative commercials and unique packaging. The brand is no longer defined by a shiny, cosmetic makeover job that's applied as an afterthought to products. Instead, customer perceptions of brand are based on the character of the brand, as expressed across the full life cycle of the product and role of the brand ambassador. Brand managers need to start measuring the effectiveness of their brand ambassador delivery in these customer touch point-oriented terms if they hope to effect genuine results for the bottom line.

MORI's 12 brand ambassador **benchmarks** to become successful brand ambassador: -

1. Show a genuine interest in helping - they clearly understand what the customer wants and are positive and helpful in delivering the required service.
2. Have the knowledge and skills to do their jobs well - they are fully trained with excellent product knowledge.
3. Appear committed to doing their best - they always strive to deliver the best solution.
4. Show appreciation for customer interests/purchases - they take a real interest in the customer's purchase.
5. Go the extra mile to make sure customers are satisfied.
6. Listen to customer needs before offering a solution - they ask the right questions and propose workable solutions.

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7. Seem to feel involved and like a part of a team - there was a feeling of teamwork, with seamless interaction between the various people and departments involved in delivering products and services to the customer.
 8. Are enthusiastic about their company's products/services - believe in what they are presenting and selling to the customer.
 9. Show pride in their company.
 10. Show pride in the company's products/services.
 11. Seem confident about the company's future.
 12. Speak highly of their company - they are happy to discuss their company's achievements and have no need to criticize the competition.

CONCLUSION

Although marketers can invoke a variety of tools to develop and maintain appropriate associations, celebrity endorsers as brand ambassador represent one way in which meanings can be transferred to brands. As such, the role of celebrity as brand ambassador endorsers can be a powerful mechanism for managing brand image. The celebrity endorsement as brand ambassador would be more effective when used consistently over time to increase the strength of the link between the celebrity and the endorsed brand. It was also suggested that when selecting a celebrity endorser, one should select those who have not been associated with another product or service. Assuring a fit or congruence between the celebrity endorser and the brand is essential towards successful and effective celebrity advertising. The perceived fit between the brand ambassador and product could be related to physical attractiveness, expertise or other relevant characteristics. Previous studies have also showed that endorser - product congruity positively affects consumers' perceptions of spokesperson credibility, attitudes, recall, recognition, purchase intention, and willingness to pay higher prices.

The use of celebrity endorsements as brand ambassador in an advertising strategy could enhance the marginal value of the advertisement expenditures and create brand equity. The particular product - endorser combinations resulted better overall attitude toward the product, greater intent to purchase the advertised product and more credibility for the endorser. Goldsmith et al (2000) found that the endorser credibility had strongest impact on attitude

towards the advertisement, while corporate credibility had impact on the attitude towards the brand.

When considering the issue of fit, one must also consider the fit of the celebrity as a brand ambassador target audience fit. This is important as the association between the advertiser and the celebrity is consistent with the target audience perceptions. Different groups of people may have different associations for a particular celebrity. It is, therefore, necessary to test the possible use of any celebrity with the brand's target group to ensure that the image/associations that the celebrity has in the minds of the target audience are meaningful and relevant. This is particularly important in a cross-cultural context where Indians have different value orientations and perspectives.

Overall, this study showed that using a well-known celebrity as brand ambassador could help to improve the subjects' rating of the commercial. Therefore, it is advisable for companies to consider using a well-known celebrity as an endorser rather than nameless spokesperson. However, the advertising practitioner should also recognize that the use of a well-known personality, who can create initial interest and attention for an advertisement, does not necessarily result in attitude changes towards the product.

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