



ETHICAL CELEBRITIES ENDORSEMENT

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Abstract: *Celebrity endorsements is a form of mass advertisement and a process of brand building in which celebrities are appointed as Brand Ambassadors of a particular brand by the organization for a period of time to get involved in the publicity of the product by means of campaigns, mass media advertising, etc. Celebrities have a significant role in the selection process of a product by the consumer. Since, in a country like India possessing huge diversity, it is evident that the influence of celebrities on the general public is higher which creates a positive as well as negative impact on the ethics of the market. So, there arises a need of some ethical standards to be setup for the celebrities which should be followed before they get themselves indulged in the process of endorsement. This paper is an attempt to create a set of desired standards which if followed may lead to stop unethical practices followed in marketing to certain extent. The paper also bring into light the unethical practices of celebrity endorsement which has been followed through decades.*

Keywords: *Celebrity endorsement, Brand building, Brand Ambassador and Ethics.*

Introduction

Ethics indicates morality. Marketing ethics is moral behaviour of the parties involved in operating and regulating the marketing process. Due to liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, the economies are growing resulting in growth of the market size and creating huge competition among brands faced by Indian and foreign companies. Marketers have been constantly finding out set of policies or framework having an impact over the market to reduce the level of competition and increase their market holding. Celebrity endorsement is a set of framework in which celebrities are hired in the process of marketing a particular brand for a certain period of time to achieve the objective of increasing their market holding.

Mukherjee (2009) founded that consumers are motivated by their self needs to utilize brand associations derived from celebrity endorsement in a contingent fashion to construct and present their self-identities [Mukherjee, Debiprasad. (2009) *Impact of Celebrity Endorsements on Brand Image*, Plano, Texas: USDR Inc, accessed online <http://usdrinc.com/downloads/Celebrity-Endorsements.pdf>, accessed on 25 July 2016]

Celebrities have very strong hold over the customers purchase decisions. This can be evidenced by study conducted by Radha and Jija (2013):

- 51% of the respondents consider quality of the product as an important factor while purchasing a product
- 45.5% respondents are able to recollect the brand that is endorsed by the celebrity.
- 53% of respondents agree that celebrity endorsement helps them to recognize a product.
- 23% of respondents strongly agree that they will get a positive image if their favourite celebrity endorses a product.
- 51% of the respondent's state that film stars endorsements persuades them personally to purchase products.
- 69% of respondents state that television is[sic] means of advertisement persuades them most to purchase a product.
- 39.5% of respondent's s strongly agrees that Sachin Tendulkar is the best celebrity endorser among all others.

- 30.5% of respondent's strongly agrees that they buy a product based on the attractiveness of the celebrity.
- 30.5% of respondents agree that they don't believe the celebrities also use those products which they themselves endorse.
- 28.5% of respondents agrees that always compare the product they own with the product the celebrities are endorsing
- 39.5% of respondents agree that investing large amount of money for using celebrities helps companies to increase their total revenue.
- 40% of respondents agree that celebrity endorsement help in strong brand promotion.

[Radha, G. and Jija P (2013) "Influence of Celebrity Endorsement on the Consumer's Purchase Decision" *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 3 (11), accessed online www.ijsrp.org, on 26 July 2016]

It is evident that celebrities do have a strong hold on the purchase decision of a consumer. So, if this form of marketing strategy is misused by the marketing parties then the interest of the society and mankind will be hampered both by health as well as wealth.

From the Maggi Case, it is evident how a normal consumable product becomes the habituated food habit of various youths and children, and how it has hampered the health of millions of consumers. But how do such products enter in our daily life. It is also through mass advertisements endorsed by leading celebrities of India, whereby the trust on celebrities get translated into the trust for the product.

Therefore one can conclude that it is not only the organization which hampers our selection process, but also the celebrities who endorses it.

Be it daily consumables such as shampoo, soaps, biscuits, cold drinks, cosmetics, food & beverages, etc or specially sought goods [these are those goods which requires special effort of buyer as it holds a prestige value] such as car, interior décor, laptops, mobile phones, wedding dresses, etc all are

endorsed by celebrities. The companies selling/marketing alcohol are using a new way to advertise their brand through different set of products such as bottled water, soda, glasses, music cd, etc. For example: Bagpiper whisky getting advertised in the form of Bagpiper soda by Ajay Devgan, a leading Bollywood actor; Carlsberg beer getting advertised in the form of Carlsberg glasses by Peter Schmeichel, legendary former goalkeeper for Denmark and Manchester United. Celebrity endorsements have also impacted the real estate in India. 'Anjaliputra' a real state project near Hydrabad Deccan was brought into the court, dealing with the extremely vexatious issue of misleading and deceptive advertising was endorsed by Genelia D'Souza, a Bollywood actress.

Why is it desired for Celebrities to be ethically responsible?

Common people hold a very keen interest in the living pattern of celebrities, which cannot be considered wise as they can lead to setting bad and unhealthy examples leading to creating a risk to health, life, society and finally to environment as a whole. To be acknowledged the celebrities have a very good public image which tends common people to follow them in aspects of dresses they wear, food they eat, car they drive, leading to a trend which is followed by mass audience. In the eyes of consumers whenever a celebrity endorses a product or a brand, it is his image which is characterised to the product. It is reminded that celebrities are also people as all others bearing the temptations, the anxieties and mental strains. But they are in the public eye bearing a good and positive image, so much to provoke bad behaviour. **So the time has come when celebrities should realize their ethical responsibilities.**

There are celebrities who have initiated the process of being ethically responsible. Sachin Tendulkar (Former Indian Cricketer) has refused 20 crore rupees offer of endorsing a top liquor brand. This initiative of Sachin was highly appreciated by Minister of Social Justice Development Sivajirao Moghe of Maharashtra Government. Since Indian

Law forbid alcohol and cigarettes companies from advertising their products, the offer to Tendulkar was to appear in a **Surrogate Advertisement**, which would finally lead to promote the liquor brand. Harbhajan Singh and Yuvraj Singh were chastigated by Sikh religious bodies for appearing in a surrogate advertisement for a whisky brand.

Badminton star Pullela Gopichand turned down a lucrative offer from a soft-drink giant to endorse their cola. He also refused to endorse cigarettes brands soon after winning All England Badminton Championship. Some Bollywood stars have also chose principles and ethics over money. Akshay Kumar refused to endorse a pan masala company while Abhay Deol has expressed reservations over endorsing cigarettes brands and fairness creams.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is the India's largest ever cleanliness drive initiated by PM Modi endorsed celebrities like Pullela Gopichand, V.V.S. Laxman (Former Indian Cricketer), Kapil Sharma (Comedian), Manoj Tiwari (Actor), Kiren Bedi (Former I.P.S), Kailash Kher (Singer), and many more is a good example of ethical celebrity endorsement.

Why Do Celebrities Endorse Unhealthy Products?

As Maggi's credibility sank for having MSG and lead beyond permissible limits, leading to FIR against their celebrity endorser's Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit and Preety Zinta for misleading their fans. Unlike western counterpart, Indian film stars are not merely actors getting paid for their jobs, as those attending superstardom are worshiped being reserved and followed blindly. The bigger the

superstardom the bigger is the belief that they can do no wrong.

Is it right to hold these celebrities responsible for the unhealthy practices of the manufacturers. As all rational consumers know that claims made by fairness creams and shampoos will not turn us into Aishwarya Rai or John Abraham.

Few decades back, processed food was restricted to urban markets, but has now made roads into rural areas, penetrating into a poor, malnourished constituency of people who lack the education to comprehend and counter their anti-health effects, making celebrities venerated by these masses, whose every word is taken as the ultimate truth, are expected to exercise judgment when endorsing colas, noodles, Kurkure and chips, that do more harm than good. Brand endorsers are not money making machines but, rather, men and women who exert a strong influence on their fan base.

Conclusion

It is understandable that it is unrealistic to expect our superstar brand ambassadors to conduct tests and verify whether the government approval on the product is deserved or not. But is it too much to expect them to exercise better judgment especially when their stamp of approval is taken as the gospel truth by their adoring fans?

By defending them and wondering why they are being scapegoats, aren't we putting them in the same category as those who lack the intelligence or education to make informed choices? Are we trying to suggest celebrities who keep themselves fit on a diet of boiled vegetables and punishing exercise regimens, actually believe Maggi Oats is healthy and Lays chips is the snack of their choice?

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