The Impact of Celebrity's Field of Expertise on Consumer Perception

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ABSTRACT

The use of celebrity based endorsements in advertising has started receiving increased attention over the past few decades due to the glamour and the popularity added in promotions is one of the most salient aspects used in promoting a brand. A vast variety of celebrities, regardless of the respective field they belong to, have started endorsing number of brands and rarely fails in capturing the consumer attention. Although, attention and attraction based objectives are achieved via these celebrities, the need affecting the consumer perception remains vital as it aids in persuading the customers to convert their purchase intention to a purchase decision. However, the impact on consumer perception with regard to the endorsements by celebrities who does not have a relevance to the endorsed product is still a question to be probed in majority of the instances. Therefore, this study carried out with the intention of identifying the relationship between the celebrities field of expertise and consumer perception, takes up a quantitative approach with the application of Chi-square test of independence in determining the association particularly with reference to the personal care product categories that exist in the Sri Lankan market.

Keywords: Consumer Perception, Endorsements, Personal Care Product Categories, Source
JEL Classification: M3

INTRODUCTION

In the context of marketing, creating and maintaining customer awareness is key and is directly linked to the positioning of the product or the company. In the process of making marketing communication activities effective, the marketers should give prominence to the source or the spokesperson who is directly involved with the audience and as the main source of communicating the message. Celebrity based endorsements is a commonly practiced concept in persuading the consumers to purchase a product. According to Shekarchizade and Momeni (2010), it is believed that the use of celebrities would aid the product in gaining a unique advertisement while engendering a positive effect on the attitude and the sales intention of the same.

In the Sri Lankan context, Unilever Sri Lanka and Hemas Holdings PLC competing in the fast moving consumer goods industry had used celebrities from different professions in their personal care product promotions. Unilever Sri Lanka has the largest variety of personal care brands while the LMRB household panel also indicates it as the highest revenue generator for the company compared to the other product categories. The personal care products can mainly be categorized as Skincare, Hair care, Oral care, Cosmetics and Fragrances. As a result of that, marketing communication related budgetary allocations for the personal care category is also the highest as opposed to other product categories (Cooray, 2016). Hence determining the effectiveness of such communications is of utmost importance.

In the Sri Lankan FMCG sector, a large number of celebrities have started to endorse personal care products as opposed

to other product types. With reference to the number of appearances it is visible that the trending celebrities who are considered to be the most popular and famous are used for the endorsements.

Ex: Dinakshi Priyasadh, Umariya Sinhawansha, Kumar Sangakkara, Saranga Dissasekara, Puja Umashankar.

Though the advertisements are skipped in majority of the instances, the glamour associated with the celebrity rarely gets unnoticed. According to Ang and Dubelaar, 2014, the audience has become rational and knowledgeable with the availability of information on firms, and as a result, they rarely react to the exaggerated claims made by the celebrities. The celebrity endorsed advertisements are perceived by the customers based on the credibility of the celebrity, attractiveness, compelling ability and the power and most importantly using the fit between the product and the user (Kamins, 1990). On the other hand, the marketers prioritize their celebrity endorsers on the popularity associated (Parmar and Patel, 2014). Approaching a celebrity based on the popularity is considered to be far easier than choosing the right celebrity with for the right brand at the right timer and also at the right degree (Maehle and Shneo, 2010). It is further stated that, the consumers prefer to find a reflection of their perceived personality in the brand image of the personal care products as it is considered to be personally attached to the user.

A study on "Celebrity endorsement in the FMCG industry", reveals that the celebrity's pleasant personality, expertise, credibility, image, unique style, suitability with the product are of utmost importance for prioritizing the endorsers (Shukre and Dugar, 2011). The findings further states that the almost all the other features are of secondary importance if the customer finds relevance to be present (Zafar and Rafique, 2010). Further to that, the relevance was determined through the profession, expertise, perceived knowledge, familiarity and the perceived image. With reference to all the factors on relevance, the profession of the celebrity was identified as a key in assessing the relevance. This was also supported through other studies indicating the importance of profession as a predictor of the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements (Tamizhjyothi and Rajakumar, 2011). Thus, choosing an endorser with the features that the consumer's considers to be significant for them, is a key as it may assist in affecting the perception and ultimately the success of the communications.

The study was driven with the main objective of increasing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in the Sri Lankan FMCG sector assisted with the sub objective of Understanding the relationship between professions (the celebrity's field of expertise).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Celebrity based endorsement concept is discussed in choosing the appropriate source; the spokesperson in broader context of marketing communications. As per the communication-persuasion model, source is the person involved in communicating the message towards the targeted audience (McGuire, 1989).

A celebrity endorser is known as "an individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken, 1989).

• Product-Match-up Hypothesis
For marketing communications to be effective, it is considered as a must to have a correspondence/a match between the endorser's image and the image of the endorsed product (McCracken, 1989).it is also believed that the customer who possess strong self-improvement objectives have a tendency to build self-brand associations for brands consumed by aspired celebrities. The Product-Match Hypothesis indicates the fact that the celebrity endorsers are to be successful when the "fit" between endorser and the endorsed brand is existing (Kamins, 1990).

The communication persuasion model is concerned with ensuring the effectiveness of the communication delivered via an appropriate source, with the correct message, and through the effective channel. The source has to be credible enough for the audience to believe in what is being conveyed, attractive enough in appealing and powerful enough in influencing the consumer perception.

To be effective with the process of communicating, the source must ensure the following:
1. Credibility - The source Credibility theory states that the effectiveness of a message is dependent upon the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of the endorser (Hovland et al., 1953).
2. Attractiveness – The source attractiveness model. The source Attractiveness model is concerned with the similarity, familiarity and the likeability of the source (McGuire, 1989).
3. Power - A source is considered as powerful when it is capable of administering rewards and punishments to the receiver.

• Celebrity endorsements and consumer perception
Consumer perception is concerned with the way an individual selects, organizes and interprets stimuli in to a meaningful and coherent picture of the world (Schifman and Kanuk, 1997). Kumar, 2010 in his study on "celebrity endorsements and its impact on consumer buying behavior", states that the people perceive celebrity endorsements attractive and effective in influencing their purchase decision. These findings correspond with the theory of McCracken, 1989 indicates that a celebrity's image is transferred onto the products they endorse through the way a person perceives.

Taneja and Khanna (2014) explains about the importance of match with the targeted audience, match with the product, image, cost, familiarity, likability and trust as major determinants in choosing an celebrity endorser.

With reference to the celebrity based endorsements in the FMCG sector, it was found that the consumers tend to give priority to expertise, trustworthy recommendations in evaluating the advertisements of personal care products such as hair care, oral care and fragrances (Sridevi, 2014). Shukre and

Dugar (2013) reveals that consumers prefer celebrity endorsed personal care products over non-celebrity endorsed personal care products. A study conducted on the same area in the Sri Lankan coNtext had found that the celebrities from the field of sports are capable of infelucncinh consumer decisions as opposed to the andorsemsnts done bt fim stars and musicians. The study further stated the importance of trustwrhiness as a key in evaluating personal care product purchase dedccions (Weerasiri and Dissanayake, 2007)

It is indicated that in >60 m years of using celebrities in endorsements, the research directs towards the fact that celebrity based endorsements to be having a favorable impact on the memory, the remembrance of the message and most importantly on generating a preference on the product as well(Roozen and Claeys, 2010).

A study on "The transference of brand attitude: the effect on the celebrity endorser", had been one of the most effective studies of the last decade as majority of the previous studies on celebrity endorsements had only analyzed the effects of the celebrity on the endorsed product. Thus, the ignored aspect reverse transference had been considered through this study which found that the celebrity's overall credibility, as well as expertise, is influenced by the perceived attitude toward a branded product (Doss, 2012).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 indicates the framework developed by the authors with reference to the findings on literature, along with hypothetical statements to be tested.

H_{11}: There is a relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for endorsing oral care products.

H_{22}: There is a relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for endorsing hair care products.

H_{33}: There is a relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for endorsing skin care products.

H_{44}: There is a relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for endorsing cosmetics.

H_{55}: There is a relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for endorsing fragrances.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research commenced with a deductive-top down approach by referring mainly the theories on celebrity endorsement and consumer perception. Since the profession or the celebrity's field of expertise aspect was prioritized, five celebrity groups were identified based on the professions. On the other hand, the personal care products were categorized in to five namely oral care, skin care, hair care, cosmetics and fragrances.

This was a mixed-method research, as it addressed both the quantitative and qualitative aspects in collecting data. Prior to the gathering of primary data, a countless amount of information was gathered from company annual reports, company brochures

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Table 1: Chi-square test statistics

Product type	Pearson Chi-square	Cramer's V
H_1: Oral care	385.630^a p=0.000	0.361
H_2: Skin care	483.786^a p=0.000	0.402
H_3: Hair care	129.293^a p=0.000	0.207
H_4: Cosmetics	450.870^a p=0.000	0.775
H_5: Fragrances	132.733^a p=0.000	0.210

and World Wide Web. Quantitative approach was used in order to measure the various views and opinions of the chosen sample using statistical approaches.

4.1 Sampling and Data Collection

A semi-structured questionnaire, comprising mainly of Likert-scale questions to test the respondents' level of agreement, served as the main primary source of collecting data. Through a pre-study conducted through the convenience sampling method, 150 respondents were chosen to complete the final survey. These respondents were prioritized based on their familiarity towards and the usage of personal care products mainly. Hence, the "expert sampling" technique which comes under purposive sampling techniques of non-probability sampling methods was used.

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach Alpha. After the questionnaire was designed and tested through the pilot survey, changes were not made as the Cronbach Alpha value was indicated as 0.8 with an indication of acceptable level of internal consistency.

5. DISCUSSION

The relationship between consumer perception and celebrity's field of expertise (profession) for endorsing personal care products was determined through the testing of the above hypothesis against a null hypothesis specified for each. Chi-square test of independence was used in determining the existence of a relationship between profession and consumer perception and it was followed by Cramer's V test in measuring the strength of the relationship tested. Accordingly the results are indicated in Table 1 with the pearson chi square value and the cramer' s v value

- Oral care: There is a moderate relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for Oral care endorsements.
- Skin care: There is a Moderate relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for Skin care endorsements.
- Hair care: There is a weak relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for Hair care endorsements.

- Cosmetics: There is a strong relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for cosmetic endorsements.
- Fragrances: There is a weak relationship between celebrity's field of expertise and consumer perception for Fragrance endorsements.

Since the Chi-square test statistics were less than the probability of the alpha error rate of 0.05, for which the, p value was equal to 0.000 for all the product categories, the null hypothesis indicating no relationship was rejected at the alpha level of significance of 0.05.

6. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Celebrity based endorsements can be considered as one of the most common in the context of FMCG marketing communications. Though the main purpose of celebrity endorsements lies in persuading a consumer for a purchase intention, affecting the consumer perceptions remains of utmost importance.

In terms of achieving the above stated purpose through endorsements, the relevance factor and the match between the endorser and the endorsed product plays a crucial role. The relevance factor is highly dependent upon the profession or the celebrity's field of expertise. The study was mainly conducted with reference to the identification of the relationship between consumer perception and the celebrity's field of expertise for personal care products. The analysis revealed that there is statistically an association between consumer perception and celebrity's field of expertise for all of the chosen personal care product types. Though an existence of such a relationship was evident, the statistical test results also pointed towards a difference in the reflected relationships in accordance with the type of the personal care product. Further to that, it can be noted that there is statistically a very strong relationship for the profession and consumer perception for cosmetics endorsements, while a moderate relationship is prevalent for oral care and skin care products. Comparatively, the relationship between consumer perception and celebrity's field of expertise is weak for hair-care and fragrance endorsements.

The findings of the research hints towards the acceptance of the fact that the use of a well-known celebrity is better than using an ordinary spokesperson. Though the findings imply as such, it can also be said that factors such as the relevance of the celebrity endorser to the endorsed product in terms of their profession would be a key for personal care products as the consumers consider it as a major determinant in evaluating an advertisement. Hence, the marketers should focus upon prioritizing the endorsement decision based on the relevance factor as opposed to the fame and popularity.

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