Celebrity Endorsers and Adolescents: A Study of Gender Influences

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Introduction

The use of celebrity endorser as the source for a communication message has increased dramatically in the past few years. Celebrities have been used to promote everything from sports drinks to digital mobile phones and the use of communication medium seems endless. Endorsers are used in broadcast media, both television and radio, print media, and even outdoor billboard advertising, and their effectiveness in each has been tested. The value of celebrity endorsements has been recognized worldwide. In India too, it has become one of the most readily accepted practices. Firms such as Hindustan Lever (Lux), Smithkline Beecham, and Action Shoes have been using celebrity endorsers for long. The recent spate of Pepsi and Coke advertisements using celebrities from tinsel world is an evidence of the ever growing popularity of using celebrity as a spokesperson or endorser in marketing communication. According to an international estimate, almost 10 per cent of all advertising expenditure is being spent to pay the endorser (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995). It has also been established that the use of celebrity endorser is not limited to any particular industry. Companies using celebrity endorsers cross all industry categories.

One of the major factors for consideration by organizations while selecting celebrity endorsers is the credibility and likeability of that particular endorser. It has been reported that a celebrity who endorses more than one product is less effective. Tripp, Jensen and Carlson (1994) argued that the number of products a celebrity endorses negatively influences the consumers' perceptions of endorsers' credibility and likeability, as well as attitude towards the advertisement. A person who is involved in communicating the marketing message either in direct or indirect manner is known as the source (Belch and Belch, 1995). This process of social influence results in an individual adopting the attitude advocated by the communicator: compliance, identification, and internalization (Kamins, 1990) and this is what gives a source its influence. Compliant relates...
to special acceptance and approval and therefore not
relevant in non-personal communication. It has been
argued that celebrity endorsements are expensive for
firms, and therefore selection process needs to be
taken into consideration carefully.

Research studies comparing the impact of ad-
vertisements with and without celebrity endorsers
have found that those featuring celebrities were rated
more positively. This was especially true among
teenagers who were more likely to project the
celebrity's credibility to the advertising message and
the endorsed product (Atkin and Block, 1983).
Expertise and trustworthiness have been identified
as the most significant indicators of source credibility
of the communicator (Homer and Lynn, 1990).

Though some other researchers have included physi-
cal attractiveness also in the analysis, to their fol-
lowers and to much of the general public, celebrities
represent an idealization of life that most people
imagine that they would love to live. Advertisers
spend enormous sums of money to have celebrities
promote their products, with the assumption that
reading or viewing audience will react positively to
the celebrity association with their product (Scott,
1991). Of all the benefits that a celebrity might
contribute to a firm's advertising programme - fame,
talent, credibility, or charisma, celebrity credibility
with the consumer audience is the most important.
Celebrity credibility is understood as the audiences'
perception of both the celebrity's expertise - how
much the celebrity knows about the product area,
and trustworthiness - how honest is the celebrity
about the product (Ohanian, 1991).

Television stars, movie actors, and famous sports
persons are widely used in magazine advertisements,
radio spots, and television commercials to endorse
products. By definition, a celebrity is a personality
(actor, entertainer or sports person) who is known
to the public for his or her accomplishments in the
areas other than the product class endorsed (Fried-
man and Friedman, 1979). According to an estimate
in the US, as many as one fourth of all commercials
employ celebrity endorsement (Spielman, 1987; Miciak
and Shanklin, 1994). Advertisers and agencies are
willing to pay enormous sum to those celebrities who
are liked and respected by target audiences and who
will favourably influence consumers' attitudes and
behaviour towards the endorsed product. Such
expectations are not over ambitious as it has been found
that consumers' attitudes and perceptions of quality
are enhanced when celebrities endorse products
(Fireworks and Friedman, 1987).

It is widely believed that celebrity endorsers
bring the benefit of their symbolic images (i.e.,
their personal meaning) to the products and services
to which they lend their name and person. Specifically,
the cultural meaning that resides within a particular
celebrity endorser is passed off to the product or
service being endorsed (McCracken, 1989; Langmeyer
and Walker, 1991; Burroughs, Hooten and Knowles,
1994). Indeed, prototypical bonding is the term used
to describe the process of associating a spokesperson's
attributes, traits, and values with a particular service
or product (Lautman, 1991). Results of a survey of
advertising executives indicated celebrity credibility,
celebrity and audience match up, celebrity and brand
match up, celebrity attractiveness, and miscellaneous
considerations as major considerations in the selec-
tion of celebrity (Miciak and Shanklin, 1994).

A celebrity's trustworthiness and expertise jointly re-
ferred to as credibility is the most important reason
for selecting a celebrity endorser. People who are
trustworthy and are perceived as knowledgeable on
a particular issue, such as brand's effectiveness, are
best able to convince others to undertake a course
of action. On the other hand, attractiveness of the
celebrity is seen as a combination of a number of
factors such as friendliness, likeability, physique, and
occupation as some of the more important dimen-
sions of the attractiveness concept. The celebrity-
audience match and celebrity-brand match is seen
by executives as being greater in importance as
compared to attractiveness. A number of other
researches have demonstrated that credibility and
attractiveness are the two basic attributes contributing
to an endorser's effectiveness as each of them involves
a different mechanism by which the endorser affects
consumer attitude and behaviour (Kelman, 1961;

Fundamentally, credibility denotes the tendency
to believe or trust someone. When an information
source like endorser is perceived as being credible,
audience attitudes are changed. This change occurs
through a psychological process called internaliza-
tion, where the receiver accepts the endorsers'
position on an issue as his or her own. An internalized
attitude tends to be maintained even if the source
of the message is forgotten or if the source switches
to a different position (Petty, Ostrom and Brock,
1981). Credibility consists of two important properties
of the endorsers, i.e., expertise and trustworthiness.
Expertise refers to knowledge, experience or skills
possessed by an endorser. It is a perceived rather
than an absolute phenomenon. On the other hand,
trustworthiness refers to honesty, integrity, and
believability of a source. While expertise and trustworthiness are not mutually exclusive, a particular endorser is often perceived as highly trustworthy but not particularly an expert. An endorser's trustworthiness depends primarily on the audiences' perceptions of his or her endorsement motivations. Earlier, researches with ethnic minorities have revealed that when a spokesperson matches the audiences' ethnicity, the spokesperson's trustworthiness is enhanced, which in turn promotes more favourable attitude towards the advertised brand (Deshpande and Stayman, 1994).

The findings of an experimental test of various magazine advertisements for two products, rachet set and body oil, had revealed that the seductive model/body oil combination was perceived most favourably by all the respondents, whereas the nude model/body oil combination was perceived as the least appealing advertisement. More importantly, females too regarded the nude model/rachet set as least appealing (Peterson and Kerin, 1977). According to the meaning transfer model proposed by McCracken (1989), the brands benefit from associations with endorsers because they acquire or possess particular configurations of cultural meanings that cannot be found elsewhere. Thus, endorsers are expected to enhance advertising readership or viewership or listener ship and induce positive attitudinal change towards a company and its products and the personality characteristics of the endorser can get associated with a brand's imagery. The endorsers' characteristics are viewed from two perspectives. First, that endorser is the source of information in the advertisement, hence contributing to the accept ance of the content of the message because of the source's credibility or attractiveness, whereas the second and more recent perspective suggests that endorser is someone possessing some symbolic properties which are transferred from the endorser to the endorsed brand (through advertising) and then from the to the consumer (through the acts of purchasing and consuming or owning the brand).

In the light of the above facts, the present study was undertaken with an objective to explore the perceptual differences amongst adolescents about effectiveness of male and female celebrity endorsers.

**Methodology**

**The Study**

The present study was focused at exploring the differences amongst adolescents' perceptions about the effectiveness of male and female celebrities. The study was aimed at filling the gap in knowledge in the domain of consumer psychology concerning gender influences on celebrity endorsers' effectiveness. The survey approach was used to collect data from the respondents to explore the influence of gender and adolescence on the perception about celebrity endorsers. A quasi-experimental design was used to analyse the data obtained through survey.

**The Sample**

A random sample of 200 subjects was selected from the cities of Indore, Ujjain, Dewas, Jabalpur, Raipur, Bilai, and Bhopal. The final sample consisted of equal number of male and female adolescents. The average age of the sample was 16 years for male adolescents (N=100) and 15 years for female adolescents. The subjects were chosen from prominent English medium higher secondary schools.

**The Tools**

For data collection, a standardized scale developed by Ohnian (1991) was used to measure celebrity endorser effectiveness on three dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. The cumulative score of the scale indicated overall effectiveness. The reliability as measured by the authors of the scale was reported to be high. The scale was administered to the subjects after developing rapport with them. The purpose of the study was not disclosed in clear terms. However, the time to respond was left to the subjects' choice. The responses were to be given on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from agree (5) to disagree (1). Instructions about celebrity to be considered were restricted to four celebrities (Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan among males and Kajol and Aishwarya Rai among females featuring advertisements of various brands of soft drinks). In order to ascertain the respondents' familiarity with the celebrities, a preliminary study was undertaken. The recall was found to be high and all the respondents were users of the brands studied. As far as the target is concerned, in the absence of any reliable published claim about the exact target of the campaigns, the authors considered the total share of the consumption of the brands in the area from which the study sample was chosen as a starting point. According to the data available, the sample universe (as per age group) accounted for almost 35 per cent of the total consumption of the products under study. Hence it was reasonable to believe that the target of the brands' communication is inclusive of the sample universe. For data analysis, the collected data were subjected to test for significance of difference between means, i.e., Z-test. The statistical analysis was undertaken after dividing the obtained data on the basis of gender of subjects and celebrity.

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Results and Discussion

Results of the study can be summarized as under:

• Male adolescents' perception of female celebrity's attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise is significantly higher in comparison to their perception of male celebrity (Zatt = 9.54, p < 0.01; Ztrt = 2.47, p < 0.05; and Zexp = 3.49, p < 0.01). Even on cumulative influence, female celebrity is found to be more influencing than male celebrity.

• There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female adolescents about male celebrity's attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. The same pattern is visible even in total score (Table 1).

• There is significant difference in the perception of male adolescents about male celebrity's attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise as compared with that of female adolescents about female celebrity. Here, female adolescents found female celebrity being more attractive, trustworthy, and expert as compared to male adolescents' perception of male celebrity (Zatt = 13.86, p < 0.01; Ztrt = 3.84, p < 0.01; and Zexp = 5.18, p < 0.01).

• Male adolescents' perception about female celebrity's attractiveness and trustworthiness is significantly higher than that of female respondents' perception about male celebrity (Zatt = 8.06, p < 0.01; Ztrt = 2.88, p < 0.05). Although there is no significant difference in the perceptions about respective celebrity's expertise, the difference is found significant on cumulative score (Zcum = 3.90, p < 0.01).

• There is significant difference between female adolescents' perception to toward attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of male and female celebrities. Female adolescents perceive female celebrities to be more attractive, expert, and trustworthy than male celebrities (Zatt = 10.98, p < 0.01; Ztrt = 4.213, p < 0.01; and Zexp = 3.14, p < 0.05).

• On total sample too, irrespective of respondents' gender, their perception of male and female celebrities' attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise differed significantly with female celebrity being perceived as more attractive, trustworthy, and expert by adolescents (Zatt = 10.15, p < 0.01; Ztrt = 3.34, p < 0.05; and Zexp = 3.28, p < 0.05) (Table 2).

As the design used to analyse the data accounted for controlled manipulation of the gender of both the subjects (adolescents) and the targets (celebrities), it can be inferred from the results that the gender of the perceiver (here the adolescents) is less an indicator of the perception of celebrity endorser (Table 2, Study groups 2, 3, and 5). On the other hand, it is the gender of the celebrity which has emerged as an influencer of respondents' perception (Table 2, study groups 1, 4, and 6). It can be argued that celebrity's gender has some influence on the judgement of adolescents regarding celebrity's attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Even on cumulative basis, the same pattern can be observed which can be attributed to the interactive effect of the gender of both the target and the perceiver.

To further the argument about celebrity's gender influencing the perceptions of the perceivers (adolescents in this case), analogous support can be drawn from the area of sex roles in consumer behaviour. It was purported that it is quite common to find products that are either exclusively or strongly associated with the members of one sex. For example, shaving equipments, cigars, ties, etc., are historically associated with males. And on the other hand, there are products that are marketed specifically targeted towards females, which include cosmetics and beauty products. Combining these arguments, it can be said that the gender of the celebrity endorser has an influence on the perception of adolescents as to whom it is appropriate to market a particular product. For example, a celebrity with a female gender (e.g., a female celebrity) is more likely to be perceived as the appropriate endorser of cosmetics, whereas a celebrity with a male gender (e.g., a male celebrity) is more likely to be perceived as the appropriate endorser of shaving equipment.

### Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Overall Effectiveness of Male and Female Celebrities as Perceived by Male and Female Adolescents (PF - 200)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Celebrity</th>
<th>Female Celebrity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Adolescents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>18.72 (4.05)</td>
<td>27.78 (5.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>20.66 (5.59)</td>
<td>23.58 (6.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>21.64 (5.43)</td>
<td>25.86 (6.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females Adolescents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>18.90 (4.05)</td>
<td>29.28 (3.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>20.00 (5.59)</td>
<td>24.82 (5.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>23.18 (5.43)</td>
<td>27.50 (5.57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Values in parentheses represent standard deviation.
Table 2: Critical Ratios for Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Overall Effectiveness of Male and Female Celebrities as Perceived by Male and Female Adolescents (N = 200)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Groups</th>
<th>Critical Ratio (Z-Valtie)</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. Male Celebrity - Male Adolescent and Female Celebrity - Male Adolescents | Attractiveness = 9.54**  
Trustworthiness = 2.47*  
Expertise = 3.492** Overall * 4.64** |
| 2. Male Celebrity - Male Adolescent and Male Celebrity - Female Adolescents | Attractiveness = 0.182  
Trustworthiness = 0.560  
Expertise = 1.108 Overall = 0.233  
Attractiveness = 13.86**  
Trustworthiness = 3.840**  
Expertise = 5.18** Overall = 6.478** |
| 3. Male Celebrity - Male Adolescent and Female Celebrity - Female Adolescents | Attractiveness = 8.062**  
Trustworthiness = 2.889**  
Expertise = 1.861 Overall = 3.904**  
Attractiveness = 1.652  
Trustworthiness = 1.080  
Expertise = 1.375 Overall = 1.280  
Attractiveness = 10.984**  
Trustworthiness = 4.213**  
Expertise = 3.139** Overall = 5.390** |
| 4. Female Celebrity - Male Adolescent and Male Celebrity - Female Adolescents | Attractiveness = 4.64** Overall = 5.390** |
| 5. Female Celebrity - Male Adolescent and Female Celebrity - Female Adolescents | Attractiveness = 9.54**  
Trustworthiness = 2.47*  
Expertise = 3.492** Overall * 4.64** |
| 6. Male Celebrity - Female Adolescent and Female Celebrity - Female Adolescents | Attractiveness = 0.182  
Trustworthiness = 0.560  
Expertise = 1.108 Overall = 0.233  
Attractiveness = 13.86**  
Trustworthiness = 3.840**  
Expertise = 5.18** Overall = 6.478** |

*Significant at .05 level.  
"Significant at .01 level.

mate products, whereas bracelets, hair dryers, and sweet smelling colognes are generally considered feminine products. Though there are researches to suggest that for most of these products, the sex link is either diminishing or disappearing blurring the line between 'male only' or 'female only' products, consumer still tend to impute sex or gender to the products and for this reason in the light of 'cultural mewrng transfer' proposition, it is reasonable to argue that advertisers should not only consider the sex of target market but also the cues associated with the products which may transfer certain meanings influencing the perceived sex of the product category (WiMsie, 1995; Shermach, 1995). In this context, as the celebrities offer variety of cues through their personality, achievements, and other attributes, their gender can be rightly seen as an important variable affecting ad-effectiveness as indicated by the current findings & The observations of Kamins (1990), further lend credence to the present findings that what makes a celebrity an effective endorser is the existence of a meaningful relationship or match up between the audience, and the product.

Another theme which supports the influence of celebrity endorser's gender on adolescents' perception of their attractiveness is the fact that the general concept of attractiveness consists of three related ideas, similarity, familiarity, and liking (Triandis, 1971). In addition, a study has demonstrated that a match up between spokesperson and audience similarity is specially important when the product or service in question is one where audience members are heterogeneous in terms of their tastes and preferences (Fieck and Higie, 1992). It has also been observed that advertising researchers have not studied attractiveness extensively, and what little research has been conducted has focused primarily on the physical attractiveness dimension only (Ohnian, 1991). The findings of the present study can be explained with the help of social comparison theory proposed by Festinger (1954), which purported that adolescents and pre-adolescents compare their physical attractiveness with that of models. Apart from this, similar influences of the gender of adolescents on their perception of celebrity endorser's physical attractiveness irrespective of celebrity's gender find significant support from earlier researches which suggested that advertising and mass media may play a part in creating and reinforcing a preoccupation with physical attractiveness (Downs and Harrison, 1985; Myers and Biocca, 1992) and influence consumer perceptions of what constitutes an acceptable level of physical attractiveness (Peterson, 1987; Richins, 1991). Further support can be found
in the assertion of Martin and Kennedy (1994a, 1994b) that female college students, adolescents, and pre-adolescents compare their physical attractiveness with that of models in advertisements and identify with the models.

On the other hand, the findings of the present study are in contrast with some other researches. According to a study of Franzoi (1995), the nature of physical attractiveness differs for male and female children and adolescents as well. He further explained that girls tend to view their bodies as 'objects' and their physical beauty determines how they and others judge their overall value, whereas boys tend to view their bodies as 'process,' and power and function are more important criteria for evaluating their physical self. On similar lines, Lerner, Orlos and Knapp (1976) reported that female adolescents' self-concepts were derived primarily from attractiveness of body, whereas male adolescents' self-concepts were related more strongly to perceptions of physical instrumental effectiveness. Further, it has been argued that as the ideal of attractiveness for girls is culturally more salient, they are more likely to be negatively affected by the masculine ideal (Franzoi, 1995). The findings of the study can be supported with the assertions of social comparison theory which holds that people have a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities, which can be satisfied by 'social comparisons' with other people. With theory as a framework, recent researches have established that fertile college students, pre-adolescents, and adolescents do compare their physical attractiveness with that of models in advertisements (Richins, 1991; Martin and Kennedy, 1993; 1994a).

Levitt (1965) tested whether the effects of sales people representing a prestigious company, a medium credible company, and an anonymous company had a differential impact on purchasing agents. It was found that better the company's reputation, better were the salespeople's chances of getting a first hearing for a new product and early adoption of the product. This may explain the present findings in terms of no difference in celebrity's effectiveness as perceived by adolescents of different gender, as they were exposed to that celebrity prior to their experience in advertisement and thus they had preset evaluations about that particular celebrity. On the other hand, similarity is sometimes important because a source that is presented as being similar to the audience in terms of attitudes, opinions, activities, background, social status or life style could achieve both liking and identification. The study can further be supported with the association principle of attraction in which the core idea is that one likes those who are associated with good experiences and dislikes those who are associated with bad experiences (Taylor, Peplau and Sears, 1997).

Another view which supports the present findings is the argument that likeable personality traits across a group do not vary significantly. Anderson (1968) explored amongst a group of college students about their choice of how much they would like a person having some of the previously selected personality traits. He found a general agreement among the students about which characteristics are desirable and which are undesirable. The findings of the present study can further be supported by the assertions of Zajonc (1968). He proposed a theory of mere exposure effect which purports that simply being exposed frequently to a person can increase one's liking for that person. This explains to some extent the insignificant difference between male and female adolescents while perceiving either male or female celebrity. It can be argued that since all the celebrities under study here are familiar faces, it is most likely that majority of respondents have seen them frequently either in movies, television programs or other advertisements. This frequent encounter of celebrities with the subjects might have led to similar feelings among the subjects.

**Implications of the Study**

The present findings provide wider implications for advertisers as well as marketing practitioners. As the study has pointed out that gender of celebrity significantly influences consumer perceptions about the product irrespective of consumers' gender, the advertisers need to come out of 'like attracts like' cage for gender-specific products. An indication from the present study is that it is the celebrities' influence in terms of achievements and image which accounts for greater influence than the sectoral gender match. Secondly, celebrity endorsements need to be seen beyond the gender-product match and audience-celebrity-gender match alone to leverage the real associative attributions inherent in any celebrity in order to influence the consumers positively rather than simply building the communication campaign for informative or awareness purposes. Thirdly, tracking consumers' changing behavioural pattern in the light of socio-cultural and environmental changes is important in order to adapt communication and promotional programmes to these changes. This will help marketers in increasing the effectiveness of the advertising programmes to extract greater benefits in terms of correct attributions and
associations for the product and better competitive effectiveness.

The present study also has the traditional limitations associated with survey research such as selection error, measurement error, and non-response error. The study was limited in its scope due to time constraint. It is suggested to replicate the study on a larger sample and for different product categories and celebrities for a comprehensive perspective of the socio-demographic influences on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements amongst Indian consumers and subsequent implications for advertising management and consumer behaviour. More focused studies should be undertaken to explore other intervening variables, such as educational background, celebrity familiarity, personality types, etc. influencing viewers’ perception and behaviour through celebrity endorsements.

References


