Dead or Living: Which Celebrity to Endorse?

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Abstract: A popular celebrity may get more than 10 endorsements and can earn in millions per endorsement deal. Given the risks associated with celebrity endorsements, one alternative is to use a dead celebrity for endorsement. Though the concept of a dead celebrity endorser has been discussed from the legal point of view, the effectiveness of such a strategy has not been researched till date. The present study explores the relative effectiveness of using a dead celebrity vis-à-vis a living one in generating favorable responses using an experimental design approach. Analysis of data collected using a 2X2 (Celebrity: Living/Dead X Product: Congruent/Incongruent) factorial design suggests that a dead celebrity generates more favorable consumer attitudes than a living one. Celebrity-product congruence did not have a significant impact on all the consumer attitude variables. This paper opens up a new approach towards celebrity endorsements for the marketer, since within ethical boundaries he/she can effectively utilize dead celebrities for brand endorsements, thereby reducing risks and costs.

Keywords: *Celebrity Endorsements, Dead Celebrity, Congruence, Experimental Design, India*

Introduction:

The practice of using celebrity endorsements in advertising to promote products can be traced back to more than a hundred years, dating back to Queen Victoria's endorsement of 'Cadbury's Cocoa' (Sherman 1985). A celebrity could be defined as, '…any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement' (McCracken 1989, 310). The growing popularity of celebrity endorsement as a marketing strategy is evident from the market statistics. Celebrities are gradually promotingbrands in different online environments (Wood and Burkhalter 2014).With this in mind, it's not surprising that the celebrity endorsement phenomenon has attracted increasing attention from practitioners and academics over the last three decades. In India, a popular celebrity may get more than 10 brand endorsements. For example, in 2018 Indian cricketer Virat Kohli had approximately 24 brand endorsements while

Indian actor Deepika Padukone had approximately 21 brand endorsements across various categories. A popular celebrity can earn anything between 1 to 8 million USD per endorsement deal. In such a scenario it becomes very difficult for the endorsed brand in case the celebrity lands up in controversy or his/her competence in whatever field he/she is known as diminishes. One alternative for the firm in this case is to use a dead celebrity for endorsement. A popular dead celebrity will be easily recognized and would also be free from any controversy as well as loss of competence. The present study objective is to examine whether a dead celebrity would be more effective in generating favorable responses than a living celebrity. The last decade has experienced an increase in the number of advertisements featuring celebrities as marketers try to make their marketing communication messages stand out amidst the clutter. With increasing rivalry for consumer attention and new product introduction, marketers and advertisers are forced to use attention-grabbing media stars(Muda and Putit 2017). Several studies found that the most important motivation for firms utilizing celebrity endorsements is for their ads to stand out in the clutter, followed by image polishing, brand introduction, brand repositioning and underpinning global campaigns (Erdogan, Baker and Tagg 2001; Charbonneau and Garland 2005). However, there may be potential disadvantages to celebrity endorsements, such as the brand may be overshadowed by the celebrity image, public controversy, image change and over exposure or loss of public recognition, and costs involved (Kaikati 1987). The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The following section provides background information on the constructs under examination in this study. In the next section, we detail the formulation of our hypotheses, and present hypotheses to be tested. The subsequent section details the research methodology. Thereafter we present the analysis and results. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of study outcomes, implications for academics and practitioners, the limitations of the study and suggested directions for future research.

Literature review

A celebrity endorsement is an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity(Bergkvist and Zhou 2016). McCracken (1989) defines a celebrity endorser as "…any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken 1989). The celebrity selected for the endorsement sometimes may be an expert in the product/related area, such as Michael Jordan endorsing basketball shoes for Nike. However, the celebrity may not be an expert in all product categories that he/she endorses. For example, David Beckham may not be considered an expert for paints used in household. In another case, the celebrity

may not be an expert in the product category but may be identified with some characteristics of the product. For example, soccer star Lionel Messi is not an expert in cola drinks (he is not a chef, nor a food expert) but endorses Pepsi. However, his soccer skills symbolize youthfulness and fun, and one of the major attributes of Pepsi is youthfulness. In this case, the celebrity is still a match for the brand even though he is not an expert.

A closer look at the literature on celebrity endorsements in the last thirty years brings out two streams of research which have been addressed by researchers. The first stream focuses on the source credibility (where the majority of such work is concentrated) and the second on congruence studies, popularly known as "match-up" studies. Both streams have been heavily influenced by literature in psychology.

"Source credibility" studies: Source credibility' studies, based on theories in psychology and communication, focus on identifying the dimensions of a credible source (which affect the consumer in the communication process) and the effects of those dimensions on the consumer (Hovland and Weiss 1952; Hovland, Janis and Kelly 1953). While there is consensus that there are three major dimensions of source credibility (i.e., trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness), the literature review finds contradictory conclusions about the impact of these dimensions of source credibility on consumer behavior. While some studies found trustworthiness to be the most important dimension of source credibility (e.g., McGinnis and Ward 1980), there were studies which supported expertise (e.g., Ohanian 1990) or attractiveness (Baker and Churchill 1977; Silvera and Austad 2004) as the most important dimension. These contradictory findings may be partially explained by the scope of the research design: some studies analyzed the impact of a single dimension of credibility on the consumer, while others incorporated all three dimensions (Ohanian 1990), or two of them taken together (Friedman and Friedman 1979; Mowen and Brown 1981; Kamins and Gupta 1994).

In the last decade, three main themes related to the effectiveness of the source have been addressed by celebrity endorsement researchers: the effect of negative information about the celebrity on the consumer, the effect of third party endorser versus the celebrity endorser, and the effect of corporate credibility versus endorser credibility. Till and Shimp (1998) found that the attitude towards the brand advertised was unfavorable in the presence of negative information about the celebrity when compared to the case where there is no negative information about the celebrity. The unfavorable level increased when the celebrity and the brand were perceived to be strongly associated. However, Johnson (2005) found that when consumers identified themselves strongly with the celebrity, their purchase intention and attitude toward the brand endorsed by the celebrity were not negatively affected even when the celebrity was associated with immoral behavior. But, he

found that consumers who weakly identify themselves with the celebrities were more influenced with negative information about the celebrity and their purchase intentions of the brands endorsed by the celebrities were unfavorable. A later study by Money, Shimp, and Sakano (2006) found that the purchase intention of brands endorsed was higher in the presence of negative information about the celebrity (the celebrity names were not disclosed) than in the absence of negative information.

Added to this, Dean and Biswas (2001) found that the effect of a third party endorser was higher on the perceived quality and the information value of the advertisement compared to that of celebrity endorsers. However, supporting Friedman and Freidman (1979), they also concluded that celebrity endorsers have a higher impact on products associated with a high psychological risk. Comparing endorser and corporate credibility, Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999, 2002) found that corporate credibility had a significant positive effect on consumer attitude-toward-the-brand, attitude-toward-the-ad, and purchase intentions, while endorser credibility had a significant positive impact only on consumer attitude-toward-the-brand and attitude-toward-the-ad (1999) and only on consumer attitude-toward-the-ad (2002). However, their 2004 study found that corporate credibility only had significant positive impact on the attitude-toward-the-brand/ad and not on purchase intentions.

The congruence research studies: Congruence studies, popularly known as the "match-up" hypothesis, have investigated the impact of similarities or correspondence between the product or brand and the celebrity endorser. The celebrity-product congruence hypothesis argues that for an advertisement featuring a celebrity to be effective, there should be congruence or 'match-up' between the celebrity and the product advertised (Kamins 1990; Charbonneau and Garland 2005). In a seminal paper, McCracken (1989) applied the meaning transfer model to explain the celebrity-product match up hypothesis and suggested that it had more explanatory power than the source credibility models of celebrity endorsements. McCracken postulated that celebrities stand for a set of meanings to the consumer. In addition, the celebrities offer a range of personality traits and lifestyles patterns to the audience/consumers which cannot be explained by the source models. McCracken suggested that a general objective of an ad should be to transfer the meaning from the celebrity to the product, and this proposition has been validated by several studies (Batra and Homer 2004; Charbonneau and Garland 2005). However, similar to the source credibility research, the match-up studies also saw several contradictory findings. For example, a study by Speck and others (1988) indicated that a product incongruent celebrity may have the same impact on advertisement recall as that of a celebrity who is congruent, while other studies (Kamins 1990;

Kamins and Gupta 1994) highlighted the importance of celebrity-product similarity in generating favorable consumer attitudes toward the product endorsed.

It is a fact that celebrity endorsement is a costly affair (Kaikati 1987; Erdogan 1999) and companies employing celebrity endorsers are at risk of losing money, as well as the reputation of their brands (Hughes and Shank 2005). Researchers such as Kaikati (1987) identified overexposure of a celebrity as a disadvantage of celebrity endorsements. Often, scandals associated with some celebrities get publicized by the media, which may indirectly affect the brand image of the product/service endorsed by them (Hughes and Shank 2005). There is also the fact that the popularity of living celebrities may decline abruptly, following lack of success in their own professions, which may, in turn, result in lack of demand for products endorsed by them. This increases the need for the advertisers and marketer to use the right celebrity who would generate the maximum favorable response from the consumers. To negate such possible counter-effects of product endorsement by contemporary celebrities, marketers and advertisers are increasingly resorting to the use of dead celebrities as endorsers (Hughes and Shank 2005). For example, Upper Deck, an advertising agency collaborated with Curtis Management Group (CMG), to use the images of legendary baseball players of yester years- Babe Ruth and Jackie Robinson to promote sale of trading card and memorabilia products (Hughes and Shank 2005). Using dead celebrities as product endorsers has two major advantages over living celebrities- they are cheaper, less demanding and free from risk of being affected by any fresh negative publicity (Van Munching 2001). There are also two factors unique to dead celebrities - the increase in posthumous fame and a growing recognition of the celebrity's creative genius after their deaths, which make their appeal different from those of living celebrities (Harris 2008). In the eyes of the public, the celebrities become a symbol of immortal reverence after their deaths, as has been the case with Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Anna Nicole Smith, Princess Diana and others (Harris 2008). Matheson and Baade (2004) have suggested that the development of such posthumous popularity for dead celebrities may be due to an increased feeling of nostalgia towards the dead celebrity who will not come back again. They claimed that often, such nostalgic sentiments get augmented by constant media coverage during and after the celebrity's death, and may sustain for a long time after the demise of the celebrity. However, other than the exception of D'Rozario and colleagues (2007), the celebrity endorsement literature is silent on the use of dead celebrities in endorsements and the positive and negative aspects of the same. Though the literature has suggested that the use of dead celebrities may help the advertiser in significant cost reduction (Petty and D'Rozario 2009), there have not been any study to the authors' knowledge where the effectiveness of the dead celebrity has been compared to that of a living celebrity. Studies have also not been conducted to see how the match-up hypothesis holds in case of dead vs. living celebrities.

Conceptualization and Hypotheses Generation

The discussion on celebrity endorsement literature clearly points out the lack of studies to test the comparative effectiveness of a dead celebrity vis-à-vis a living celebrity. Moreover, as the literature suggests several drawbacks of using a living celebrity over dead celebrities in advertising such as increased costs and risks of negative publicity, (Kaikati 1987) it seems obvious that a dead celebrity would be free from them and would generate more favorable consumer attitudes than the living celebrity. As per the source credibility theory, the three major factors which determine the credibility of an endorser are: expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Attitude towards trustworthiness for dead celebrities can be considered to be more stable compared to living celebrities, because the trust factor in living celebrities may get diminished by some recent negative events in their personal lives. As for expertise and attractiveness, theory of nostalgia (Matheson and Baade 2004) suggests that dead celebrities are often glorified after their deaths by their fans resulting in enhanced regard for their abilities and charm. Such sentiments may lead to higher perceptions about expertise and attractiveness of dead celebrities compared to living celebrities. This may lead to a more favorable attitude towards products endorsed by dead celebrities than those promoted by living celebrities. Thus the first hypothesis of the study could be stated as:

> **H1**: A popular dead celebrity would generate more favorable consumer attitudes than a living celebrity.

The celebrity-product congruence literature (e.g., Friedman and Friedman 1979; Kamins and Gupta 1994; Mittelstaedt, Riesz and Burns 2000; etc.) has suggested that a celebrity congruent with a product would generate a more favorable impact on the consumer attitudes than an incongruent one. Previous studies have received mixed results in support of the product congruence theory. In the context of dead celebrity endorsements, it was important to test this theory, because the results could provide important implications for practitioners and ad designers as to whether to use dead celebrities irrespective of the product nature, or whether to match the celebrity's posthumous image with that of the product. Following from there and related to our objective, it would be relevant to test whether a product congruent dead celebrity creates a more favorable impact than a product incongruent dead celebrity. The subsequent analysis would also enable us to find out the presence of any interaction effect. Thus the second hypothesis of the study is stated as:

> **H2:** A product congruent celebrity would generate more favorable consumer attitudes than a product incongruent celebrity.

Methodology

Experimental Design was selected as the methodology in this case because of its

ability to test theoretical relations (Bagozzi and Yi 1989). The dependent variables were Attitude towards the Ad (AAD), Attitude towards the Brand (AB) and Purchase Intention (PI). All the three dependent variables have been taken from literature and were measured using 5 point semantic differential scales. A series of pre-tests were conducted on multiple groups of students taking a post graduate course in Business Management to identify the levels of the independent variables. The age of the students ranged between 18-22 and male female ratio was 3:2 (approx). The first pre-test was performed to select the dead and living Celebrity which the respondents would like to watch in advertisements. The second pre-test was performed to select the Celebrity – Product combinations. The preferred dead celebrity was singer Kishore Kumar and the living celebrity was actor Aamir Khan. The congruent and incongruent products with Kishore Kumar were a Music Related Website and a Brand of Suiting respectively and the same for Aamir Khan were Wrist Watch and Hair Oil respectively. The design used here was a 2X2 (Celebrity: Dead/Living) X (Product: Fit/Misfit) full factorial design. Fictitious ads were created for each treatment and the experiment was conducted at a premier business school in south India. The respondents were post graduate (MBA) students in the age group 21-27. They were in the target group of respondents of the product categories selected in the pre-tests. Thus the sample was appropriate. The treatment groups had approximately 30 respondents. The students were first given a brief about a fictitious celebrity management firm which has a problem deciding on celebrity endorsements. They were informed that the firm wanted to test some ideas and thus they were conducting the said study. Then the treatments were administered on the respondents. Each test booklet had some filler ads other than the treatment ad. Once the filled booklets were collected, the students were debriefed and dispersed. Multivariate Analysis of Variance was used as the research tool for the study and the entire analysis was performed using SPSS 16.

Major Results

The datacollected was analyzed using MANOVA. The main effects suggested a significant effect of Celebrity on the dependent variables (Wilks' Lambda = 0.810, F (3, 114) = 8.904, p = 0.000). The Celebrity product fit (Fit as variable name) was also found to be significant (Wilks' Lambda = 0.839, F (3, 114) = 7.288, p = 0.000). However, the interaction term was not found to have a significant effect (Wilks' Lambda = 0.989, F (3, 114) = 0.432, p = 0.730). The MANOVA results (Table 1) suggested a significant effect of the Celebrity on 5% level of significance on all dependent variables. However, the Celebrity product fit was having a significant on only AAD (F = 18.987, p = 0.000) whereas the effect was not statistically significant on AB (F = 1.762, p = 0.187) and PI (F = .848, p = 0.359).

Table 1. Study 1 MANOVA Results

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Celebrity	AAD	9.425	1	9.425	18.919	.000
	AB	5.208	1	5.208	10.312	.002
	PI	12.893	1	12.893	20.499	.000
Fit	AAD	9.458	1	9.458	18.987	.000
	AB	.890	1	.890	1.762	.187
	PI	.533	1	.533	.848	.359
Celebrity * Fit	AAD	.074	1	.074	.148	.702
	AB	.268	1	.268	.530	.468
	PI	.726	1	.726	1.154	.285

The Post Hoc (Bonferroni) tests suggested that the dead celebrity (Kishore) scored more than the living celebrity (Aamir) on all the consumer attitude variables, namely AAD (Mean Diff = 0.561, p = 0.000), AB (Mean Diff = 0.417, p = 0.002), and PI (Mean Diff = 0.656, p = 0.000) at 5% level of significance (Table 2). Thus, H1 was fully supported whereas H2 was partially supported.

Table 2. Study 2Post Hoc Test Results

Dependent Variable	(I) CELEB	(J) CELEB	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
AAD	Kishore	Aamir	.561(*)	.129	.000
AB	Kishore	Aamir	.417(*)	.130	.002
PI	Kishore	Aamir	.656(*)	.145	.000

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Discussion

The study findings suggest that proper use of a dead celebrity can lead to more effective impact on the consumer attitudes. The insignificant impact of the congruence on AB and PI imply that the consumers are not so much influenced by the celebrity-product congruence when it come to evaluating products and forming purchase intention. This goes against the standard notions of the congruence hypothesis in celebrity endorsements (such as Kamins 1990; Kamins and Gupta 1994). The most important implication of the study is a question which could be raised to the advertiser who is using the celebrity endorser as a marketing strategy. Celebrity endorsements are costly affairs and the celebrity who is getting a lot of endorsements is obviously a popular celebrity. In India, a popular celebrity could earn up to INR 50 millions from an endorsement deal. The present study questions the effectiveness of such expenditure. Utilizing a dead celebrity (provided there are no legal or ethical problems) would not only save the marketer some cost but

at the same time would give same effectiveness as a living celebrity. Moreover, since the selected dead celebrity would be a popular one even when he's/she's dead (practically speaking, a marketer would not like to have a controversial dead celebrity as an endorser) there would be no image loss or decline in popularity because of the celebrity's personal actions. Moreover, the insignificant interaction effect suggests that the dead celebrity is more preferred irrespective of the product being congruent or incongruent to the celebrity. The study partly supports the propositions in support of the use of dead celebrities as suggested by Petty and D'Rozario (2009). Thus, the study findings suggest the marketers to try out, or at least give a thought to a strategy which could solve their purpose of a celebrity endorsement and at the same time save some costs and risks.

Implications of the Study

The results of the present study have few implications for the managers, one of them being in terms of the positioning of the brands. Managers must ensure that the positioning of the brand is such that the brand communicates a personality which is similarto the personality of the dead celebrity so as to sync with their target group. This would lead to better association of the target group with the brand, leading to a favorable attitudesubsequent purchase intention. Also, it is essential that the dead celebrity's personality should be inspirational for the target consumers so that the consumers have a desire to use the brand to move towards the inspired personality of the celebrity.

Further, advertisers who are making use of dead celebrity as brand advocates must take into consideration the celebrity's lifetime public reputation along with the achievements as presented by the media, social mediator special interestgroups. Just as constructive traits about the celebrity might affect the endorsed brand, adversetraits mayalso spread over to the brand, probably in bigger magnitude(Muda and Putit 2017). Lastly, managers must take due precautions while using dead celebrity for endorsement as selecting and managing the dead celebrity is a double-edged sword. They should be creative while selecting dead celebrities to endorse their brand and influence the target consumer brands.

Limitations and Future Scope

The present study is subject to few limitations that throws open avenues for future research. One of the limitations of the study was the use of student sample, which could be addressed in future research by expanding the study to a more general audience. Given the fact that the study was a single country study, future research should investigate the effect of culture as a moderator and check whether similar relationships hold for countries with different cultural set up. The present study has tried to provide a novel approach to celebrity endorsements which was sparsely practiced and also not addressed by marketing researchers.

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