

Examining the role of Celebrity on social media during Covid-19 outbreak

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of celebrity endorsement on behavioral intention during Covid-19 pandemic situation. The study was conducted on Uttarakhand (India) youngsters and explored celebrity influence and trust on social advertising. By using quantitative approach, the study analyzed the youngsters' behavioral intention during the outbreak. It also studies the significance of social advertising on the youth behavior. The sampling procedure employed is a convenience sampling due to the pandemic situation in the country. The questionnaires were mailed and responses were obtained from 500 people in Uttarakhand (India). The results affirm that the attractive image of Celebrity positively affects the behavioral intention of respondents toward advertisement and message comprehension. However, marketers must understand how to use celebrity endorsement effectively in social advertising to change the behavior intention during pandemic time period.

Keywords: Advertising; Attractiveness; Celebrity Endorsement; Social advertisement; Word of mouth

Introduction

Celebrity endorsement is considered to be a most persuasive marketing strategy used by the brands to make their product more compelling to the customers. In fact, it is since ages in the advertising world that celebrities are been used as a technique by the marketers for enhancing trade. Due to the increase in competition advertisers are relying more on to the celebrity endorsement as celebrities help in attracting the customer and influence consumers behavior. Consumers consider celebrities as the opinion leaders as they have a command on the society, so consumers will prefer to purchase the products endorsed by their favorite celebrity.

Advertising has been considered as the most influential and successful promotional marketing tool. It is a medium of information and persuasion, social advertiser can use it in a

positive way for adding benefits to the society. Celebrity usage in an advertisement helps in better positioning of products in the target audience. In addition to it, celebrity can also be used to correct misconceptions which consumers hold during pandemic situation. As previous researchers have found that the celebrities have immense potential to change the image of product in the mind of customers due to the affiliation and their inclination towards them. The researcher in this paper considers five main indicators of celebrity i.e. attractiveness, trustworthiness, familiarity, similarity and expertise in the celebrity endorser, to analyze the effect of celebrity endorsement related attitude on consumers intention to behavioral change.

Since, ages celebrities are been used to promote a brand. They are always been preferred by the marketer over other tools because of the celebrities influence and glamour. The rationale behind this is that famous faces attract consumers to the brand and the ultimate aim to appeal the targeted audience can be achieved successfully. The various factors like values, appeals, followers, popularity, and ethics plays an important role while choosing an ambassador. The large numbers of celebrity followers facilitate the marketer in circulating the timely information about updated content and product message at an ease. Thus, the idea behind celebrity endorsement usage is en route message to maximum number of people during the epidemic time.

Advertisements play an important role in our Indian society and are considered as an effective and reliable medium of publicizing messages to customers. Celebrity endorsement helps in circulating the social messages and in eradicating social issues prevailing in our society as individuals are influenced by their opinions. Social Advertising is an emerging concept and less research work has been done on the topic in India.

This research draws and builds on findings from an extensive primary survey and also from the various empirical and conceptual studies subject to secondary analysis. As this study explicitly examines interrelationships between celebrity endorsement and social advertising in the Indian context, it is definite that this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and its influence on consumer behavior during disease outbreak. The research is focused on the social advertisements endorsed by few selected celebrities during this phase of Covid-19, viz; Amitabh Bachan, Akshay Kumar, Katrina Kaif, Kartik Aaryan, Aia Bhatt, Madhuri Dixit, Anupam Kher, Ms. Dhoni . The organization of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides a

brief literature review. The research methodology used in the paper is discussed in Section 3. The data analysis and findings are provided in Section 4, followed by certain concluding remarks in Section 5.

Literature Review

Social marketing is defined as “the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole”(Kotler, P., & Zaltman, G., 1971). It is based on media-based messages that are projected to create awareness, educate or stimulate people in the society to engage themselves in voluntary social activity such as health service, environment conservation, national unity, etc. Thus, we can say that social advertising is used to change the perception, attitude and behavior of people as well as to bring a positive social change in society (Minakshi Chauhan Asopa- 2010).

The celebrities considered as an opinion leaders helps in social movements by mobilizing their followers and convincing them (Benford and Snow 2000), people targeted through this social movement receive the information about current environment and are guided about the actions to be taken (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013). Furthermore, if individuals perceive certain opinion leaders as self-interested or less credible, they avoid the views of those opinion leaders’ (Stoker 1992; Testa 2018). This paper attempts to study the effects of celebrity opinion leaders on individuals. The researcher studied how individuals respond to them and verify whether opinion leader statements in media are able to persuade the individuals to take corrective actions during Covid-19 outbreak.

The various studies have already concluded that the celebrities help in gaining the customers’ attention towards advertisement due to their attractiveness and likeability (Erdogan, 2001). Celebrities in social advertisement are considered to have positive influence on credibility, recall and likeability of the advertisements and finally on purchase intentions (Menon et al., 2001; Lafferty and Golsmith, 1999; Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995). Thus, from the literature review it can be stated that celebrity endorsers have positive influence on behavioral intentions. So, this paper studies the behavioural change during pandemic situation.

According to Rockwell & Giles (2009), celebrities are the one who can inspire consumers’ desires, hopes and dreams. They help in creating bond and develop connections with

consumers (Thomson, 2006). Furthermore, advertisements are been used to create a link between the product and the celebrity which can positively influence consumer behavior toward a product (Tripp et al., 1994). So, this research will analyze the impact of celebrity endorsement characteristics related attitude towards social advertising and its influence on change in behavior among consumers in Covid-19.

Despite the frequent use of celebrities on advertising and student's strong interest in the celebrities, there is not much study that investigates specific elements of celebrities in social advertising that appeal the most to the students. This study attempts to fill the gap.

Dimensions of Celebrity Endorsement

Physical Attractiveness

According to Patzer (1985), "Physical attractiveness is an informational cue which involves effects that are subtle, pervasive, and inescapable; produces a definite pattern of verifiable differences; and transcends culture in its effects". Mills & Aronson, (1965) in their study found that the communicator attractiveness, influence the audience views which increases the effectiveness of communication. It results that an attractive celebrity can act as an opinion leader and create an opinion change among customers.

Celebrity Expertise

The term expertise is defined as "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). Belch and Belch (1994) in their study found that customers have strong belief on the celebrity who possesses product related knowledge, and are expertise in the advocating area. If the celebrity advocating the product has strong knowledge and experience, then he/she will ultimately have differential power to pursue due to strong believability (Amos et al., 2008). Ohanian (1991) contends that the perceived expertise of a celebrity is more important in explaining consumers purchase intentions and carries more persuasiveness rather than their attractiveness and trustworthiness.

Celebrity Similarity

According to Belch and Belch (2001) similarity is defined as "a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message". Furthermore, he concluded that the message received by a celebrity similar to consumers' influences more and impact their buying behavior.

It was also found that it is easy to recall and react if source endorser and brand possess a similarity.

Celebrity Familiarity

According to Belch and Belch (2001) familiarity is considered to be “the level of knowledge a celebrity possesses of a brand”. According to Minh Ha & Hung Cam (2017), familiarity of a celebrity depends on different factors such as frequency to see the celebrity in different advertisements; frequency of the products celebrity is endorsing; frequency to see celebrity at different events etc.

Celebrity Trustworthiness

As per Miller and Baseheart (1969) the impact of source trustworthiness in the advertisement has high persuasion. It resulted that if a celebrity is perceived to be highly trustworthy, then a message communicated has high impact in producing attitude change. Furthermore, it was also found that the celebrity trustworthiness was highly correlated with the respondents perceived source similarity, source expertise and the source attractiveness.

From the available literature it can be that the celebrity endorsement has significant influence on consumers' behavioural intention. The celebrity attractiveness, expertise, credibility, trustworthiness all have positive influence towards their behavior. The literature review found very little information about the moderating effect of social advertising message or content on consumers' behavioural intention, and thus the researcher has taken the social advertisement message as the moderator for the current study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between celebrity endorsement in social advertising and consumer's behavioural intention. It is important for the marketer to emphasize when choosing endorsing celebrities, as it is essential to understand the consumer's expectations in order to maintain a productive outcome.

Hypotheses

H1: Attractiveness towards celebrity in social advertising has a positive effect on intention towards behavioral change.

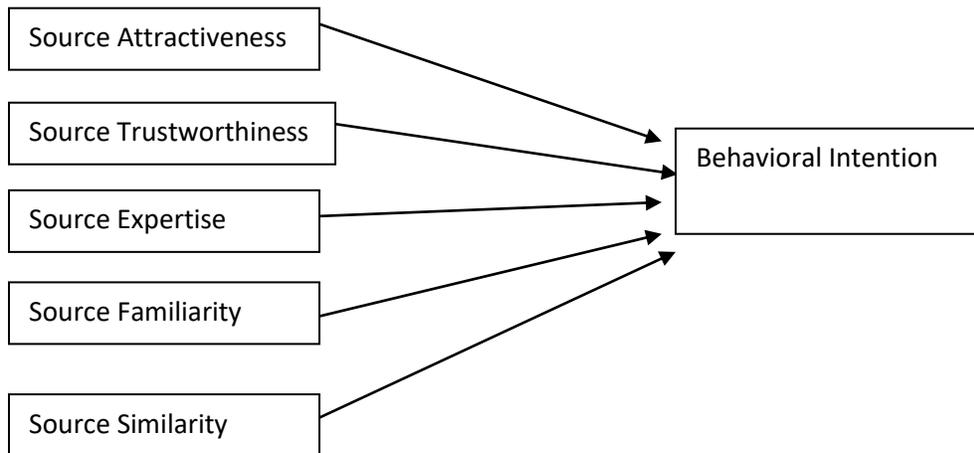
H2: Trustworthiness towards celebrity in social advertising has a positive effect on intention towards behavioral change.

H3: Expertness of celebrity in social advertising has a positive effect on intention towards behavioral change.

H4: Familiarity towards celebrity in social advertising has a positive effect on intention towards behavioral change.

Figure1

Conceptual Model



Research Methodology

Population and Sample

For accomplishing the purpose of study data is collected from university students and through self-administrative questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed to people age between 17 to 30 years and their qualification ranges between Graduation to PhD with a vision about true findings of the studies.

Participants and Procedure

Main aim for selecting the said population is that young people having keen interest and awareness about what is being offered by advertisement and by whom it is endorsed so they can easily recall for making linkages and respond correctly for presented questions.

Out of the total population, a sample of 500 respondents from different districts of Uttarakhand was selected to gather primary data. The problem statement focused on identifying the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in social advertising during pandemic situation. A combination of convenience and purposive sampling technique was adopted. Data was collected through a well-developed structured questionnaire. Sample size for the study is five hundred (500), questionnaires were filled through Google form and four hundred eight (486) questionnaires are received back.

The consumer's responses were assessed covering Source Attractiveness, Source Expertness, Source Trustworthiness, Source Similarity and Source Familiarity. These were measured by a seven point Likert type scale (7= Strongly agree to 1= strongly disagree) .

Data Analysis and Findings

In order to carry out the data analysis of the study, 500 questionnaires were distributed to consumers who use social media for product purchasing decisions were selected to gather data. The data analysis was done by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 22.0. A pilot study was conducted primarily in order to assess the extent of reliability and validity of the research questionnaire. In order to ensure reliability , Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The value of 0.84 for Cronbach's alpha indicates good internal consistency of the items in the scale.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis on the measurement model was performed using AMOS 20.0. To validate scales in this study, factor scores, average variance extracted (AVE), Composite reliability (CR) were calculated. Goodness of fit test on the model using maximum likelihood estimation showed GFI= 0.94, RMSEA=0.06, and CFI=0.96, indicating that the model shows good fit indices of measured variables. Further, standardized factor loading of all the variables is greater than 0.7, indicating that it is statistically significant. The detailed analysis of CFA is shown in the Table1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, AVE,CR

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Source Attractiveness	4.2396	1.40319	0.815	0.769	0.524
Source Expertise	4.8343	1.21345	0.856	0.736	0.506
Source Trustworthiness	5.0991	1.15111	0.819	0.752	0.507
Source Similarity	4.5695	1.39792	0.803	0.771	0.529
Source Familiarity	5.1787	1.10166	0.870	0.787	0.547

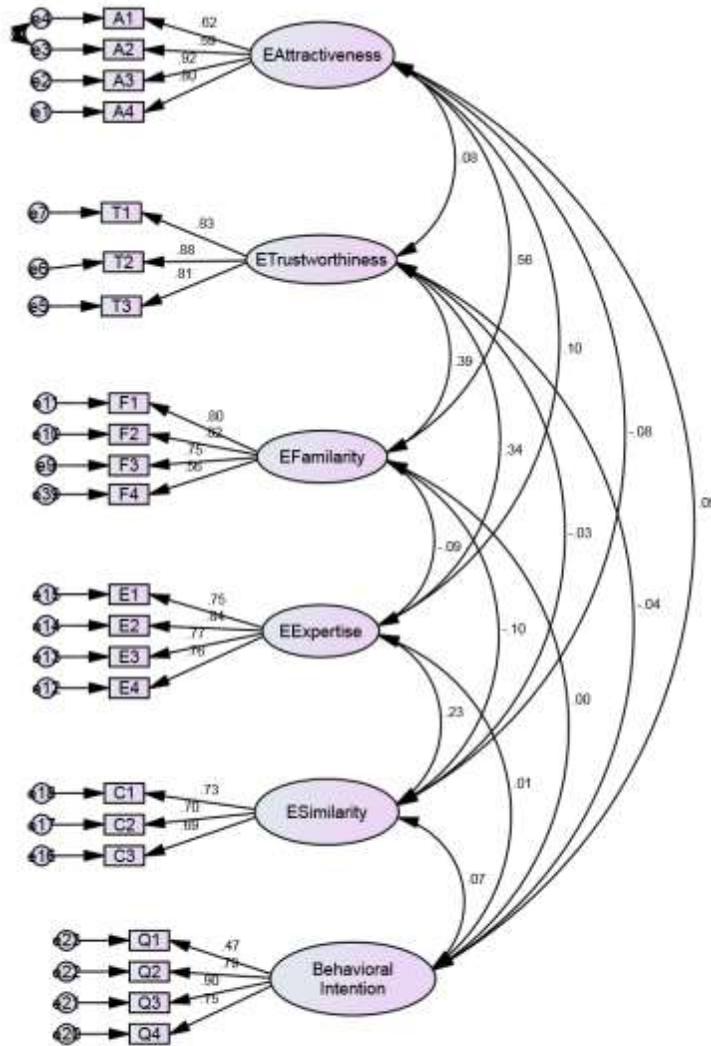
Source: Survey Data

Construct Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all the variables satisfy the standards i.e $CR > 0.7$, $AVE > 0.5$ and $CR > AVE$. Further, SEM analysed validity and reliability of the variables, which have been confirmed.

Celebrity Expertise is the only variable that has an insignificant negative impact on attitude towards social advertisement. All the other variables identified in the conceptual framework are found to be significant due to the significance value that exceeds the threshold of 0.05. This is in accordance with the rule of thumb that the p-value should be 0.05 and below; thus, each time when the value is more than 0.05, the hypothesis is rejected (Hair et al., 2010). Thus Hypothesis is tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Confir matory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Figure 2: Measurement model (CFA)



The CFA model indices shown in table 2 illustrate the model’s overall performance compared to the baseline parameters.

Table 2: CFA Indices

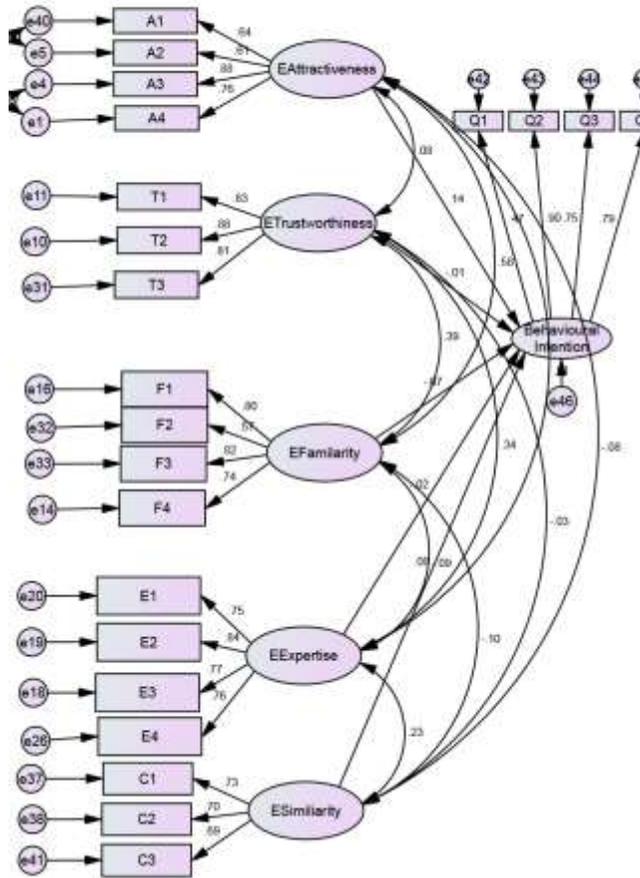
Model Fit Indices	Achieved Values	Baseline Values	Remark
CMIN/DF	1.934	<3 "good fit", <5 "marginal fit", >5 "poor fit"	Good fit
NFI	0.913	>= 0.9	Good fit
RFI	0.9	>0.9	Good fit
CFI	0.9	>0.9	Good fit
GFI	0.9	>0.9	Good fit
AGFI	0.9	>0.9	Good fit
RMR	0.16	<0.05	Bad fit
RMSEA	0.079	<= 0.05 "close approximate fit", >0.05 but <0.08 "marginal fit" ,>=0.10 "poor fit"	Marginal fit
PCLOSE	0.002	>0.05	Poor fit

Overall, from the values we can say that the model is accepted as it has a good fit (Themessl-Huber, 2014).

Structural Equation Model

Figure 3 below show the path model achieved after the analysis of data. It explains how the risk perception and fear impact the behavioral intention and buying behavior of customers. Table 3 shows the model fit indices achieved from the data analysis using AMOS.

Figure 3



The measurement model of confirmatory factor analysis plays an important role to confirm the structural model analysis. In the structural model, the normed chi-square value is 1.484, below the recommended threshold value of 3.0, revealing a good fit model (Hair et al., 2010). The RMSEA value of 0.057 is at the required threshold of less than 0.08. CFI is 0.923, above the rule of thumb of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). Hence, the structural model is considered as an acceptable model.

Structural Model

To test hypotheses in the research model, the standardized estimates, Critical Ratio are represented in the table. The decision about hypothesis testing is explained.

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Path	Estimate	C.R	p-value	Result
1	Attitude towards Social Advertisement <--- Celebrity Attractiveness	.115	5.3	***	Supported
2	Attitude towards Social Advertisement <--- Celebrity Trustworthiness	.145	4.9	***	Supported
3	Attitude towards Social Advertisement <--- Celebrity Expertise	.057	1.7	.122	Not Supported
4	Attitude towards Social Advertisement <--- Celebrity Familiarity	.382	4.1	***	Supported
5	Intention to behaviour change <--- Attitude towards Social advertisement	.783	5.7	***	Supported

Concluding Remarks

The main objective of this research was to examine the impact of social advertising on consumer behavioural change. From the empirical research, three major determinants that have an impact on intention to behavioural change were identified as: celebrity attractiveness, celebrity trustworthiness and celebrity familiarity. The findings reflect message by celebrity in an advertisement as an important factor that contributes to change in behavioural intention of the respondents. Overall, organizations who aim to increase social awareness and respondents' attention should consider using celebrity in the social advertisements.

The study proposes that when a celebrity is perceived as attractive then the person's intention to change behaviour will be high. The hypothesis was tested using SEM. The test results showed that celebrity attractiveness leads to an intention for change in behaviour. This

indicates that when the advertisers take a decision about the celebrity they should try to get a celebrity who is attractive among the target audience. Another important finding of the study is that the celebrity expertise has a negative relationship with intention to change the behavior. It suggests that the respondents are not influenced by the expertise of a celebrity when the message has a social cause like Covid-19. These findings are important for social advertisers who are interested in using celebrity endorsement marketing strategy to understand attractiveness, trustworthiness and familiarity with the celebrity is important to get a positive response from respondents.

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