When Celebrity Supports the Cause Related Marketing Communication? Role of Brand – The Effects on Consumer Attitudes and Purchase Intentions

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I. INTRODUCTION

A growing number of firms are adopting cause – related marketing approach to achieve specific objectives. In an environment of increasing competition, product parity and demanding consumers, it has been suggested that cause – related marketing is a unique win-win strategy (Holmes and Kilbane, 1993; Ptacek and Salazar, 1997). Cause related marketing as a communication strategy is developing in an environment of increasing interest in corporate social responsibility (Cunninghum, 1997; Sen and Morwitz, 1996). Firms engage in cause related marketing to fulfill a number of objectives related to corporate strategy, marketing strategy or individual product strategies with objectives broadly falling into the following three categories – Revenue Generation, Corporate Image or Brand Equity.

Cause related marketing strategy involves a three way relationship between company or brand, cause and customer. The customer directly affects the level of support the cause receives from the company and the combination of the cause and brand is likely to influence the customer's response. The outcome of the cause related marketing strategy is contingent upon the interaction of the three parties.

It has been suggested that, when there is congruence between the brand and the cause, consumers are more likely to respond favorably (Hamlin & Wilson, 2004). It is highly likely that congruence will allow the brand to generate positive returns, whereas non-congruent relationships may even be detrimental to the brand. (Hamlin & Wilson, 2004; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). One variable that has been assumed to be influential to the ultimate success of the partnership is the fit or logical connection between the brand or product and the cause.

Research in the domain of advertising and marketing communication suggests that message source has a strong positive influence on advertising persuasion. Recently it has been observed that company or brands use known celebrities to promote their cause related marketing communication (e.g. Amir Khan supporting for Malnutrition among infants and youngsters,). Celebrity endorsement as a marketing strategy has received considerable attention in advertising literature but till date there exists no research that establishes the effectiveness of the use of celebrity in cause-related marketing strategy. Keeping this in view, this research aims at the following objectives

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the effectiveness of the use of celebrity in cause-related marketing communication.
2. To explore whether use of celebrity in such communication would influence attitude towards advertisement, attitude towards brand and purchase intention under varying level of source conditions.
3. To determine if cause - celebrity– brand fit is a necessary criterion to influence these dependent variables.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A 2 (Message Source) x 2 (Perceived Fit) full factorial between subjects experimental design has been used to achieve the research objectives. The independent variables included Message Source (With Celebrity / Without Celebrity) and Perceived Fit (Good Fit / Bad Fit). A total of one hundred sixty students participated in the study. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions.

The product category used in the study was a maggi noodles which is a relevant product for the target sample of the study. A real brand rather than a fictitious brand name has been used in the study. The brand that has been included in the study is "WAI WAI NOODLES" which is now available in some parts of India, basically it is from Nepal and the respondents in the pretest studies were unaware of this brand. Two separate pretest studies were conducted. The first pretest study was administered on 50 respondents to determine the name of celebrity to be included in the study. The respondents were asked to recall a celebrity who generally appears in Indian advertisements. The celebrity with the highest recall was included in the study. The second pretest was administered on 50 respondents to identify the good fit and bad fit causes that would form the partnership with the brand of wai wai noodles. The respondents were shown 10 different causes were asked to rate on a 7-point scale anchored at (1) not compatible at all and (7) very compatible, the means indicated the most compatible cause and the least compatible cause. Causes were chosen from the same cause category to prevent any confounds in the design.

Four separate coloured advertisements were prepared with different manipulations. All the advertisements contained similar headline and body copy. After seeing the advertisement, the subjects were asked to provide information on the dependent variables including attitude towards advertisement, attitude towards brand and purchase intention. Subsequent to this manipulation checks were made. Respondents were asked to give the name of the celebrity appearing in the advertisement and perceived fit was measured using three 7-point scale as has been used by Lafferty (2007). Finally the demographic information was collected at the end of the study.

IV. FINDINGS

The ANOVA results ensured that the manipulation check for message source was successful. The respondents in With Celebrity condition were able to name the celebrity whereas in the Without Celebrity Condition they were unable to name the person appearing in the advertisement. Similarly the manipulation check for fit was also successful.

The findings of this study suggest when celebrity appears in a good fit cause, the attitude towards brand and purchase intention increases thereby supporting the use of celebrity in cause-related marketing communication.

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