

Impact of Celebrity Endorsed Advertisements on Rural Consumers' Purchase Intention Towards Mobile SIM Cards : A Study Conducted in West Bengal

** Debarun Chakraborty*

Abstract

Purpose : This study was conducted to find the impact of celebrity endorsed advertisements on rural consumers' purchase intention towards SIM cards. Companies have tapped the rural market with the help of various strategies and have used celebrities to advertise their products in the market. There is a lack of empirical research on celebrity endorsements of telecom services in rural markets of India.

Design/Methodology/Approach : I used descriptive research with cross-sectional design for this study. The study was conducted with multiple regression analysis to find out the results.

Findings : The study revealed that familiarity was the most influencing factor under celebrity endorsements which had a significant and positive effect on purchase intention of SIM cards among rural consumers of West Bengal. The results also discovered that congruence did not have any impact on rural consumers' purchase intention.

Practical Implications : This study will be useful for telecom companies - who are operating in rural markets - to enhance their subscriber base. The study also revealed that celebrity endorsements in the rural market are quite profitable and the telecom companies can use celebrities to promote their brands.

Originality/Value : The study was conducted in rural areas of West Bengal and the customers' perceptions were gathered from the rural consumers only. In this domain, so far, no studies have been conducted in West Bengal.

Keywords: celebrity endorsement, purchase intention, expertise, familiarity, congruence, trustworthiness

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In today's market in India, consumers are exposed to a huge number advertisements in various media, and this is one of the reasons that companies are not finding a proper position to establish their brands in the market properly ; also, consumers are facing difficulties to retain the messages or information. This is the reason that companies are using celebrities from different spheres as using celebrities creates a unique image of a particular brand compared to others in the market. It also creates a positive effect on consumers, as now, they can identify the brand or product easily with increasing purchase intention (Ranjbarian, Shekarchizade, & Momeni, 2010). Celebrity advertisement is not a new concept, and it is being utilized by various companies for around 50 years or more than that. In 1979, around six companies used celebrity endorsements in their various advertisements ; whereas, in 2001, this figure had grown up to 25% (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001).

With the advent of celebrity advertisements, the cash flows of various companies are increasing as well as the use of celebrities is also increasing day by day. The popularity of the celebrity advertisements has reached such a stage that not only every year the demand of the celebrities is increasing, but also, the money demanded by the celebrities to endorse products/brands is also rising. In India, people are quite obsessed with celebrities, especially

**Assistant Professor, Department of Management & Social Science, Haldia Institute of Technology, Haldia - 721 657, West Bengal. E-mail : debarun84@gmail.com*

cricketers & Bollywood actors, and companies want to penetrate their products into markets by cashing on these particular emotions of masses. It is also true that media provides the information regarding celebrities to the common masses, and people get entertained with stories, gossip, and news of celebrities (Choi & Rifon, 2007).

Celebrity endorsers are used by marketers on account of their fame and publicity so that their positive image will influence an individual's perception towards the products, services, brands, companies, or other non-business entities. Although the purpose of celebrity endorsement by the business entities is focused on maximization of sales, but the non-business entities rely on celebrities because of their mass communication skills to attract people's attention in creating social awareness or other demographic, economic, and political issues. Since celebrities have a large potential to reach a large number of prospective consumers, their endorsements for a company's products or services is largely effective. The celebrity's impact on brands can be caused by various factors like popularity of the celebrity, the match between the brand and the celebrity, as well as the attractiveness and frequency of a particular ad on various media (Sharma, 2016). Celebrity endorsements are the very well identified formula to gain loyalty amongst consumers. There is a strong relationship between celebrity endorsements and brands, and it boosts the behavior of the consumers to choose a correct alternative (Mukherjee, 2012). Celebrity endorsements are always influencing the consumers' minds to buy a particular product, and the consumers think that these brands are good enough because the information is coming from credible sources (Chavda, 2012).

Wedgwood, a company producing pottery and chinaware, played the pioneering role of using celebrity endorsements in 1760s. The company used royal endorsements as a marketing device to show value in the company and promote their products among others (Vemuri & Madhav, 2004). In 1988, Kotler defined brand image as, "the set of beliefs held about a particular brand" (p. 197). From the research carried out by Keller and Aaker in 1992, it can be proposed that the brand with an ameliorate brand image can achieve enhanced development pertaining to the market to which it belongs. Although choosing a reliable, trustworthy celebrity for endorsing a company's products and services is important, but on the other hand, the celebrity's attractiveness, power, and publicity can be considered as the key success factors for the company's brand image.

Present Scenario of Celebrity Endorsed Advertisements

The telecom companies in India who are operating in both urban and rural areas have used several celebrities in their advertisements. Celebrity advertisements are very much effective, especially in rural areas as compared to urban areas due to several factors. Recent trends say that in the case telecom companies, they are not using celebrities as much as they have used them before. Presently, the telecom companies are using limited budgets in ad campaigns and due to this, they are rarely using celebrities. Vodafone first the introduced "ZooZoo Series" in the market and it was a huge success for them and they have not used any celebrities till date. A recent ad of Vodafone introduced few unknown models and a particular species of dog. They have also used a famous dancer couple in their ads. Vodafone wants to convey the message that they are normal people and they are also using Vodafone SIM cards like any simple person.

Airtel is another company who has used many celebrities in its ads like Shah Rukh Khan, Vidya Balan, R. Madhavan, A. R. Rahman, Saif Ali Khan, and Kareena Kapoor. However, presently, Airtel is also using models or fresh and young faces for their campaigns. Sasha Chettri is the new sensation of Airtel and her presence gave a really positive feedback and most of her ads were hit. Idea started their venture a few years ago, and since 2007, Junior Bachchan has been its brand ambassador. But in recent ads of Idea, Abhishek Bachchan has not been seen. Recent Idea ads are mostly based on ideas or challenging other telecom companies with simple models. Reliance Jio is using celebrities in its ads and is using normal models also. At the time of IPL in 2017, Reliance Jio used various celebrity cricketers for its ads. Aircel also started with MS Dhoni as a brand ambassador, but right now, he is nowhere in the picture.

Majority of the rural people are interested in viewing celebrity ads ; whereas, urban people are not so interested in viewing celebrity ads. In the rural areas, the effectiveness of celebrity ads is also high. The rural households in India have a weakness for celebrities, especially film artists and cricketers. Rural people are more emotional as compared to their urban counterparts and some of the companies are using these celebrities to hit their emotional areas. If somebody at the age of 18, male, is a fan of cricket, then he is automatically going to love MS Dhoni or Virat Kohli. If the telecom companies are using any of them as their brand ambassadors, then automatically the emotion of cricket will get involved and the boys/men will buy that particular SIM card of which their favourite star is a brand ambassador. The same logic applies to girls/women also. It is very much evident from various research studies that the rural population has accepted the celebrity advertisements wholeheartedly and they are very much interested to see the ads again and again.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Previous studies from various sources were studied and from the studies, few categories have been generated. These are :

(1) Impact of Celebrity Endorsements on Purchase Intention : Suganya (2016) suggested that although celebrity endorsements has become a trend and a successful tool of advertisement in modern India, but it is a difficult task to forge a strong relationship between a product and an endorser. If the product or service is properly compatible with the endorser, it can be marvellous for the company, but it may affect the goodwill of the company and its brand otherwise.

Saravanaraj and Pillai (2016) stated that although several efforts in the advertisement of green products have been made by the retailers, but these were proven to be less effective to influence the customer's awareness towards green purchases. The same can be more effective when made through celebrity endorsements and creates a positive impact among the customers to purchase green products.

Appiah and Missedja (2016) observed that celebrity endorsements had a strong, positive, and significant relationship with customers' buying behavior as compared to the relationship with customers' perception, which was weak, positive, and significant. Considering the due importance to be given to developing optimum public perception, there must be a strategic fit in selecting the right celebrity for endorsing a product or service. This can enhance customers' confidence in making their buying decisions.

Ali and Mishra (2016) observed that television is the media mostly preferred by the middle class consumers regarding advertisements of products or services or other social awareness issues endorsed by the celebrities such as film stars, sports persons, etc. Apart from the celebrity's impressive appearance and good public image, which are the two important factors a celebrity must possess, the celebrity's ability to relate the product with the consumers was the most important factor influencing the buying decision of middle class consumers and making the celebrity endorsement effective.

Sarangan and Sarangan (2016) empirically examined the impact of celebrity endorsements with respect to the factors - trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and familiarity and the level of the same created through TV ads. They further analyzed that each of the factors had specific indicators as mentioned below :

Trustworthiness - dependable, honest, reliable,

Attractiveness - beautiful, good looking, classy, elegant,

Expertise - experience, knowledge, skills, qualification,

Familiarity - recognition, popularity, acceptance.

The study revealed that the factor "attractiveness" of celebrity endorsements had the highest level of significance to influence the consumers' buying decisions.

Aurangzeb, Sami, Asrar, and Bhutto (2017) said that for effective results, it was necessary to match the celebrity's personality and characteristics with that of the brand while designing an advertisement, although the task is not an easy one. The physical attractiveness of the celebrity influenced the customers' perception towards the products advertised. This can maximize the sales and may also help in gathering the lost customers.

Khan, Rukhsar, and Shoaib (2016) revealed that despite attractiveness, degree of expertise, and trustworthiness of the celebrity endorsed, a large number of buyers could only be impressed if the celebrity had a perfect match with the product, service, or brand to be advertised by the company and may initiate their purchase decision. However, other criteria such as quality, usage, and affordability cannot be looked down upon.

From this category, we have identified that there are five variables that mainly influence the purchase intention of the consumer, and these are familiarity, expertise level, trustworthiness, congruence, and attractiveness.

(2) Impact of Familiarity : Popularity of a celebrity mainly depends on the publicity and people's attitude towards celebrities (Belch & Belch, 1994 ; Erdogan, 1999). If the exposure of the celebrity is delayed and if it makes a long delay, then it may fade away, which may not be good for a particular brand or product (Bornstein, 1989). The brand and celebrity combination will be successful if the celebrity is familiar to the masses, and gives the people a positive intention to purchase a particular product. The credibility of any celebrity who is endorsing a particular brand is also a key factor to influence the customer towards that particular brand. From the literature, we have developed the hypothesis :

✍ **H₁:** Familiarity of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.

(3) Impact of Expertise Level : Celebrity sources are always influential compared to others and if the celebrities have become expert sources, then they can easily influence the consumers to buy the same brand or product which they are endorsing (Aaker, 1997 ; Ohanian, 1991). The celebrities who are an expert of a particular field generate a higher level of brand recognition compared to those celebrities who are not experts and it also explains how effective that particular celebrity is (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). The celebrity who has the expertise in a particular field can bring trust and belief very easily to a brand/product. Companies want to spread the message with the help of expert celebrities to capture the market and communicate the message effectively to the customers. Skill, knowledge, and experience - these three are the most important characteristics of celebrities to promote a particular brand, and it is called as perceived expertise. At the time of selecting a celebrity for a particular brand, the company should think about the matching between the celebrity and the target audience (Bergkvist & Zhou 2016). The consumers who collect information from particular celebrities have a strong faith in them and they also believe that celebrity endorsers have a high level of judgment due to the expertise in similar fields (Amos et al., 2008 ; Ohanian, 1991). Hence, the following hypothesis is framed :

✍ **H₂:** Expertise level of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.

(4) Impact of Trustworthiness : The consumer's point of view iterates that trustworthiness is something how a normal person thinks about a particular celebrity - whether the celebrity is trusted or not (Erdogan et al., 2001). Liking and trust are the two main factors which inspire the companies or advertisers and from the consumers' point of view, if the likability towards a celebrity increases automatically, people will start trusting celebrities (Friedman, Santeramo, & Traina, 1979). If a celebrity comes into the news due to some scandals or negative news against them, then automatically, the believability and trust will start decreasing not only for that respective celebrity, but also for brand or company endorsed by that celebrity (Pamar & Patel, 2014).

Celebrities have fans and followers, and they are going to support them unconditionally and that is why it is one of the most important criteria of success for telecom companies and sometimes, this trust for the celebrities will

enhance the brand image or a company's overall image (Ibok, 2013). Consumers generally have a perception that celebrities are mostly trustworthy and they can really rely on them (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000).

✎ **H₃:** Trustworthiness of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.

(5) Impact of Congruence : If the consumers find similarities with celebrities who endorse particular brands, then automatically, a better impact is going to be created (Erdogan, 1999). This is the reason when companies are using celebrities, they are trying to match them with common people (Belch & Belch, 1994). Celebrities are taken in advertisements because they command high respect in the consumer's mind and the consumers also believe that they are a very credible source (Kamins, 1990 ; Kotler, 1997). A belief needs to be created in the consumers' mind that whatever products they are consuming, the celebrities are also using the same (Jagre, Watson, & Watson, 2001). The product will stick into the consumers' memory if consumers can feel that there is a similarity between them and the celebrities (Misra & Beatty, 1990).

✎ **H₄:** Celebrity congruence has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.

(6) Impact of Attractiveness : Physical attractiveness is not only the attractiveness what everyone refers to; attractiveness can be skills, styles, personalities, etc. (Erdogan, 1999). If a very attractive celebrity is endorsing a brand, then people after seeing him/her can try to emulate the celebrity or can try to adopt the brand. Celebrity attractiveness is not limited to the celebrities' beauty or their physical appearance, but there are also other non-physical characteristics which attract consumers like intelligence, screen presence, attitude, etc. (Langmeyer & Shank, 1993). The celebrity endorser who is endorsing a particular brand has to be attractive in various aspects like physical appearance, charm, lifestyle, etc. and it always give a favorable impact to the consumers. It has also been found out that attractive endorsers have a recollection in the consumer's mind easily. Physical appearance also has a great effect on various medias like print & electronic media as well as it gives respect to the celebrities (Ohanian, 1991). Physical attractiveness is very much influential and the celebrities who are physically attractive are easily respected by the consumers (Kamins, 1990 ; Menon, Boone, & Rogers, 2001).

✎ **H₅:** Attractiveness of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.

Objective of the Study

✎ To study the impact of celebrity endorsed advertisements on rural consumers' purchase intention.

Research Methodology

A research design provides the framework to be used as a guide in collecting and analyzing the data. For this study, I have used descriptive research and the type of research design is cross - sectional. Cross - sectional design is a one-shot research study at a given point of time and consists of a sample (cross-section) of the population of interest. Primary data were collected for this particular study through a pre-tested questionnaire, which was simple, easy to understand, and consisted of close ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed among the various telecom subscribers of rural West Bengal and the sample was collected with the help of multistage sampling from various areas of rural West Bengal. The sample size along with the various divisions has been shown in the Table 1.

I collected a total of 250 responses from various subscribers of rural West Bengal and out of that, only 180 properly filled & complete responses came back, with a response rate of 72%. The rural areas were selected due to the rural prominence of those particular areas and after so many stages Rampurhat, Chanchal, Alipurduar,

Table 1. Area - Wise Break - Up

West Bengal (250 respondents)				
Burdwan Division (50 respondents)	Malda Division (50 respondents)	Jalpaiguri Division (50 respondents)	Presidency Division (50 respondents)	Medinipur Division (50 respondents)
- Birbhum district	-Malda district	- Alipurduar district	-Howrah district	-Bankura district
-Hooghly district	-Uttar Dinajpur district	- Cooch Behar district	-Kolkata district	-Jhargram district
-Paschim Bardhaman district	-Dakshin Dinajpur district	- Darjeeling district	-Nadia district	-Purulia district
-Purba Bardhaman district	-Murshidabad district	- Jalpaiguri district	- North 24 -Parganas district	-Purba Medinipur district
		- Kalimpong district	- South 24 Parganas district	-Paschim Medinipur district
Birbhum District	Malda District	Alipurduar District	Nadia District	Purulia District
-Suri Sadar Subdivision	-Chanchal Subdivision	Alipurduar Subdivision	-Krishnanagar Sadar Subdivision	-Purulia Subdivision
-Bolpur Subdivision	-Malda Sadar Subdivision		-Kalyani Subdivision	-Raghunathpur Subdivision
-Rampurhat Subdivision			-Ranaghat Subdivision	-Jhalda Subdivision
			-Tehatta Subdivision	-Manbazar Subdivision
			-Bethuadahari Subdivision	
			-Karimpur Subdivision	
			-Majhdia Subdivision	
Rampurhat	Chanchal	Alipurduar	Karimpur	Manbazar

Karimpur, and Manbazar were selected (Table 1). I assured the respondents that whatever responses they provided would be kept confidential. I used the two staged data collection method which contained the pre-tested method with 50 respondents and then, the full-fledged testing with 180 samples was used to conduct the study. I used a 5 point Likert scale in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate, on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “*highly important*” to “*highly unimportant*,” a statement explaining the degree of their perceived importance of a factor. For overall data analysis, I used SPSS 21 with multiple regression analysis to obtain the results. The study period of the research was from May 3, 2017 to January 22, 2018.

Data Analysis and Results

(1) Validity Testing : In order to be certain about the research instrument as well as the data collected, the validity was checked. For this study, face validity, content validity, discriminant and convergent validity were checked for confirmation of the instrument. In face validity, researchers determine whether or not their instrument is valid enough to measure what it intended to measure and this is done by taking the validity of the instrument at face value. In order to validate the instrument, academicians, professionals, and potential respondents were shown the questionnaire to thoroughly review and analyze the content. Content that was unfit and may have caused issues in the future was deleted or modified. In content validity, the content of the questionnaire was thoroughly checked and matched with the theoretical framework. Three questions were deleted after analyzing the content so as to make sure that the instrument was valid. In this manner, both face and content validity was checked.

The construct validity contains convergent and discriminant validity. Between the various variables, the factors had a strong correlation coefficient and most of the correlation coefficient values were in the higher ranges. So, it is

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.893	6

proved that the convergent validity existed. Though there were high correlation coefficients between the variables of a particular factor, very weak correlations also existed between one factor's variable to another factor's variable. In this way, it is proved that the discriminant validity existed.

(2) Reliability Testing : The reliability analysis with the help of Cronbach's alpha measurements was conducted with the independent variables and the dependent variable. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most popular measures of reliability testing. If the value of the Cronbach's alpha is more than 0.7, then the measure is reliable (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010 ; Nunnally, 1978). This is the most widely accepted technique for finding out the internal consistency of the data. The Table 2 reveals that the Cronbach's alpha value is .893, and from the literature, I found that a value of more than 0.7 is reliable. Here, overall reliability of the study was judged by the Cronbach's alpha for six variables and it is good (0.893) in the study. Cronbach's alpha was also used to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire, and it was found to be strong and reliable. As the value is well above 0.70 ; hence, it can be concluded that the Cronbach's alpha result is acceptable.

(3) Regression Analysis : The five factors which have been identified from the literature review are : familiarity, expertise level, trustworthiness, congruence, and attractiveness. Here, purchase intention has been used as a dependent variable and the remaining five factors have been used as the independent variables. The multiple regression analysis will give the answer regarding which is the most influencing factor for rural subscribers while choosing to purchase SIM cards of various mobile service providers.

It can be inferred from the Table 3 that to test the multiple regression, at first, 0.798 is observed to be the correlation coefficient (*R*) for Model 1, which emphasizes an amount of correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (purchase intention). The *R* - square value explains 0.636 or 63.6%, which is quite acceptable for the study. The Durbin - Watson statistic mainly explains that there is no auto-correlation, though the value is quite close to 2.

The Table 4 iterates that the ANOVA table shows that the *F* - value is 11.483 with degrees of freedom 5, and here, the significance value is .000, which is less than .05, which means that the value is quite acceptable.

Table 3. Summary of the Model (Regression)

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> Square	Adjusted <i>R</i> Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.798 ^a	.636	.623	1.100	2.005

a. Predictors: (Constant), familiarity, expertise level, trustworthiness, congruence, attractiveness

b. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

Table 4. ANOVA Table for Regression

Model		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
1	Regression	69.519	5	13.904	11.483	.000 ^b
	Residual	210.681	174	1.211		
	Total	280.200	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), familiarity, expertise level, trustworthiness, congruence, attractiveness

Source: SPSS v 21

Table 5. Summary of the Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.590		4.557	.000		
	Congruence	-.024	.089	-.025	.785	.513	1.948
	Expertise Level	.050	.085	.054	.591	.527	1.899
	Attractiveness	.043	.054	.056	.807	.896	1.116
	Familiarity	.445	.063	.474	.000*	.976	1.025
	Trustworthiness	.103	.073	.104	.000*	.813	1.229

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

*Significant at 1% level

Table 6. Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	p - value	Assessment
H ₁ : Familiarity of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.	0.000	Accepted
H ₂ : Expertise level of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.	0.005	Accepted
H ₃ : Trustworthiness of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.	0.000	Accepted
H ₄ : Celebrity congruence has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.	0.785	Rejected
H ₅ : Attractiveness of the celebrity has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention.	0.001	Accepted

It can be inferred from the Table 5 that multicollinearity has been checked through the variance inflation factor (VIF), which needs to be less than 3 for the acceptability range. Here, all VIF values are in acceptable range in and it can be inferred that the variables are free from multicollinearity.

From the coefficient table, I observe that familiarity has the highest unstandardized *B* value of .445 as well as the *t* - value is also high. So, it is the most preferred factor with respect to purchase intention. After that, the second most preferred factor is trustworthiness with the *B* value of .103 and then attractiveness is the third most preferred factor. The other independent variable - expertise level is the fourth most influencing factor, whereas congruence does not have any impact on purchase intention. The factor named congruence is also found to have a negative influence on the consumers' purchase intention.

Expertise level, attractiveness, familiarity, and trustworthiness are found to have a positive and significant influence on rural consumers' purchase intention towards mobile SIM cards. It is also observed that all the four factors are quite significant at the 1% significance level ; whereas, congruence is not significant at both 1% & 5% significance levels (Table 6).

So, here, the multiple regression equation can be expressed as :

$$\text{Purchase Intention} = 2.590 + (-.024)X_1 + (.050)X_2 + (.043)X_3 + (.445)X_4 + (.103)X_5$$

where,

Congruence = X_1 , expertise level = X_2 , attractiveness = X_3 , familiarity = X_4 , trustworthiness = X_5

Discussion

It is interpreted from the results that familiarity is the most influencing factor under celebrity endorsements which had a significant and positive effect on purchase intention of SIM cards among rural consumers of West Bengal.

Generally, the rural people are much more curious and seek information regarding celebrities. They always believe that the celebrities are respectable, trustworthy, and expert enough to provide the correct information about the various brands. This is the reason that celebrities are widely accepted by the rural people as compared to urban people. Another issue is that, rural people are much more emotional as compared to their urban counterparts, and they get emotionally involved with the advertisements. In movies, sports, and teleserials, the urban consumers see that the celebrities are also behaving like them and are using the same products which they use. However, this is not the case with respect to the rural consumers, because their lifestyle and the lifestyle of the celebrities is widely different. They also understand that the ground reality is that MS Dhoni endorses the brand AIRCEL and Abhishek Bachchan endorses the brand IDEA, which does not mean that they have been or will be using the SIM cards of these brands for several years. If they are not personally satisfied with the networks of these companies, then definitely the celebrities will switch their brands. At the same time, when they are shifting from one brand to another, it does not mean that they will not do the endorsement of the previous brand. Due to these particular ground realities, the rural consumers do not find themselves to be similar (congruent) to celebrities. Vodafone has created its own model, the “ZooZoo Series” because people can easily relate themselves with cartoons as compared to the so called celebrities. But all the other aspects like trustworthiness, expertise level, attractiveness, and familiarity had a strong, positive, and significant impact on purchase intention of SIM cards among rural consumers.

Managerial Implications

Celebrity endorsements play a significant role in brand recognition, where the common people are able to recognize a brand from its attributes. In India, film stars, TV stars, and sportspersons are the main focus for creating marketability of a product, service, or a brand, or to create social awareness through celebrity endorsements. Celebrities have a great deal of potential to influence the choices made by the common people in their day-to-day life style. In this regard, most companies endorse their products, services, or brands through the selection of various celebrities from different fields. Although it is an expensive matter for the company, but if it is effective, it can bring higher returns on investment. On the other hand, it leads to sustainability of the celebrity's fame of being a brand ambassador. Celebrity endorsements can be explicit, in which a celebrity makes a promotional statement, and implicit, in which a celebrity appears beside a brand without making any promotional statement regarding the quality.

The recent trends in telecom companies in the context of celebrity endorsements reveal that the major telecom companies like Airtel, Vodafone, Idea, Aircel are not using celebrities to promote their brands anymore. The budget is a big factor for the telecom companies and the trendsetter in this area is Vodafone. The “ZooZoo Series” of Vodafone has had a huge impact on the market, and no celebrities have been hired by it for endorsing the brand. The success of Vodafone was a eye opener for other companies as Airtel, Aircel, Idea, and to some extent, Jio also do not use celebrities anymore in their ads. Jio started its ads without celebrities and its main aim was to catch the common people's attention and it got a huge success in this. After launching the brand, Reliance used cricketers and Bollywood actors in some events like IPL 2017, KBC, etc. to promote Jio.

The results of the study explain that in rural areas, people are very much affectionate about celebrities, and rural people also feel that celebrities are trustworthy, expert, and attractive. The celebrities who are very much popular amongst the rural masses are always able to get a better penetration in the rural market. Also, popular celebrities, who are tied up with big brands, always have a cutting edge in the rural market. The marketers need to make some separate strategies for the rural market and they can use celebrity endorsements in this market effectively. Only for the rural market they might not use TV advertisements due to the high cost, but print ads or hoardings or product packets with celebrity faces can be incorporated. Marketers now need to think about few marketing strategies which will be rural centric to continue their success in the rural belt.

Conclusion

The phenomenon “celebrity endorsement” has become one of the important widgets of advertising over years. In the competitive market, most companies take the initiative to promote their products, services, or brands through the involvement of celebrities, especially film stars or sportspersons. Such marketing strategy has been used with the intention to influence the purchase decision of a target group of customers. The non-profit organizations as well as other associations also endorse celebrities either to create social awareness among the common masses or for the need of recognition and favor. The findings of the study reveal that celebrity endorsements are effective for advertising companies' brands or products or services. These can also be used for creating social awareness among the individuals by the non-profit organizations. But the individual response depends on the perfect match between the product or service endorsed by the celebrity and the capacity of recalling a particular brand. The general attractiveness of the celebrity towards common masses, his/her trustworthiness, the familiarity of a particular celebrity, and the expertise on the product or service to be endorsed are the relevant factors responsible to favor the celebrity in influencing the people in making purchase decisions and responding to social awareness. Celebrities are quite useful to get a place in the consumers' mind as compared to non-celebrity based advertisements. In a study, consumers also claimed that they mostly purchased those brands which were advertised by the celebrities (Ahmed, Seedani, Ahuja, & Paryani, 2015).

Limitations of the Study and the Way Forward

The respondents were from rural areas of West Bengal only. So, the results cannot be generalized for the rural population of the entire country. The urban consumers' behavior is quite different from their rural counterparts ; so, their perceptions may also change. Few important papers may have been overlooked and due to that, some new factors may have been overlooked. The respondents provided their responses at a given point of time and that may change with time. The sample size of the study was also limited. Future studies can be conducted with a larger sample size, the time period can be extended, and the study can be conducted in different geographic regions to obtain new interpretations. A comparative analysis of various results will provide more robust results. In addition, future studies can extend the number of factors taken for the analysis that have not been considered in the present study.

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About the Author

Dr. Debarun Chakraborty did his BE in Chemical from VTU Belgaum, MBA in Marketing from WBUT Kolkata, qualified UGC NET in Management (twice) in June 2012 & December 2012, & completed Ph.D. in Management (Field - Marketing) from Vidyasagar University, West Bengal.