

Changing Face of Authority Figures and Influencers in the New Age: A Study of New Emerging Practices in the Indian Advertising Industry

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Abstract

Advertising is the key focus because it plays a pivotal role at the junction where the economy and culture interact. Advertising trends have evolved from the quintessentially traditional print ads and TV spots to new marketing strategies that include QR codes, co-branding, content marketing and online advertising. While print and TV are steadfast in the ad industry, new technology is opening new avenues to reach consumers. India's ad revenue is expected to grow by a subdued 12% to \$17.3 billion in 2023, according to a report by advertising agency GroupM. In marketing, authority figures can have a significant influence on customer decisions. Endorsements from celebrities, experts, or even satisfied customers can add credibility to a product or service. This can lead to increased sales and brand loyalty. Moreover, Influencer collaboration has moved beyond the status of merely being an improvement in the dynamic world of modern marketing, and has instead established itself as a crucial component of a well-planned marketing strategy. Leading organizations now assign particular budgets designed for influencer marketing campaigns in an effort to stay at the very forefront of industry trends. Every firm appears to be eager to utilize influencer marketing to its fullest potential as the market matures and changes. The research aims to propose an in-depth review on the strategic change happening in the Indian advertising industry in relation to the use of authority figures and influencers for promotional activities.

Keywords: Indian advertising, television commercial, Indian authority figures, influencer advertising, Influencer collaboration

Introduction

Influencer marketing has seen an exponential rise in the digital age, becoming an integral part of brand growth strategies. With the increasing dominance of social media platforms, influencers have emerged as key players in shaping consumer behaviour and driving brand awareness. A lot of research has been done to determine exactly what influencer marketing is, why companies are using it more and more and what it brings them (Backaler & Shankman, 2018; Coll, 2019; Genú, 2019; Levin, 2019). Influencer marketing is described as a new effective and cost-efficient marketing tool as it is not perceived by customers as advertising (Ye, Hudders, De Jans, & De Veirman, 2021). It is today a key component of the firm's digital marketing strategies (Abidin, 2015) used to promote brands and reach very engaged audiences. This strategy could be compared as an evolved word-of-mouth marketing as it works thanks to experience sharing, user-generated content and spreading via blogs and social media (Ye et al., 2021). Authenticity is one of the driving forces behind the success of influencer marketing. Unlike traditional advertising methods, where brand messages are often perceived as forced or insincere, influencers have the ability to connect with their audiences on a personal level.

They build a loyal following by sharing genuine experiences, opinions, and recommendations. For instance, travel influencers who share their adventures and provide honest reviews of products or destinations can create a significant impact on their followers' travel choices. Influencer marketing allows brands and companies to promote their product through tools such as influencers and social networks. Many industries are using this growing marketing strategy such as sports, technology, food and travel (Ingrassia et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2021). Influencer marketing presents new opportunities to the beauty and fashion industry (Paço & Oliveira, 2017). Consumers are particularly bound to follow influencers in product categories that deal with fashion and beauty (Nafees et al., 2021). Indeed, beauty and fashion influencers are very numerous and arouse great interest in followers. Another reason for the rise of influencer marketing is the increasing scepticism towards traditional advertising. Consumers are becoming more adept at filtering out advertisements, skipping commercials, or using ad-blockers. However, they are more likely to trust recommendations from people they perceive as relatable and trustworthy. By collaborating with influencers who align with their brand values, companies can tap into the influencer's credibility and authenticity to reach their target audience effectively. Social media platforms have played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of influencer marketing. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and other platforms have provided influencers with a global stage to showcase their talents, expertise, and lifestyles. Social media influencers are users of social media who are being followed by a significant number of other users (De Veirman et al., 2017; Harrigan et al., 2021).

As they share a part of their lives with relevant content, they provide the impression that the followers know them. Users develop admiration, para-social interaction; which refers to the relations people have with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956); perceived similarity, sense of belonging, intimacy and psychological closeness which play an important role here (Ye et al., 2021) This makes the influencers more trustworthy by users. As they reach large audiences, and thanks to their popularity companies and brands use them to promote products or services. Brands have recognized the power of these platforms in reaching a vast audience and have tapped into influencers' social media presence to promote their products or services. For example, fashion brands often collaborate with Instagram fashion influencers to showcase their latest collections, resulting in increased brand visibility and sales. By definition advertising is designed to persuade consumers. Persuasion occurs when exposure to information results in an attitude change (Olson & Zanna, 1993). When applied to advertising, successful persuasion occurs when advertising changes consumers' attitudes, beliefs and behaviour toward the product, brand or service (Wells et al., 2006). According to Jung and Kellaris (2006), the authority principle refers to "the tendency of individuals to comply with the recommendations or directives of authority figures." The use of an authority figure technique with consumers can be successful in specific situations (Berry, 1988). When a consumer is feeling inadequate or incompetent in some way, they are willing to abdicate responsibility to an authority figure who offers reassurance, protectiveness and security.

However, when used incorrectly, authority figures can perpetuate a sense of superiority, leaving consumers feeling inadequate, foolish and angry at the advertiser (Berry, 1988). The lack of research on the authority principle in advertising stands in sharp contrast to frequent use of authority appeals in advertising practice. For example, General Mills uses mothers as spokespersons for "Kix" cereal. McNeil Consumer and Specialty Pharmaceuticals features moms for their "Motrin," children's fever reducer. In France, work place superiors and teachers are often used as spokespersons (Zhenyi, 2001). In all of these cases, spokespersons are featured as authorities upon whom consumers can rely. Despite the widespread use of non-celebrity authority figures in global advertising, little is known about their effectiveness and their applicability across different segments and cultures. *The research aims to propose an in-depth review on the strategic change happening in the Indian advertising industry in relation to the use of authority figures and influencers for promotional activities.*

Role of Authority Figures in Advertising in India

Consumer behaviour involves making a purchase decision based on available resources, i.e., effort, money, and time (Chiang et al., 2016). Furthermore, Tsao et al. (2019) proposed a holistic view of consumer buying behaviour. Consumer behaviours are those activities and processes in which individuals choose and utilize ideas, products, services, and experiences. Li et al. (2021) stated that consumer behaviour analysis is another tool to examine the complexity of marketing operations. Meanwhile, Sumi and Kabir (2018) demonstrated that today's consumers are kept in the dark about when and what they desire, all of which results in interactive advertising. Consumer behaviour is a mixture of consuming and purchasing products and services (Sundararaj & Rejeesh, 2021).

Therefore, Anetoh et al. (2020) explored seven steps of consumer buying decision which needs recognition: search for information, pre-purchase, evaluation, purchase, consumption, post-consumption evaluation, and divestment. Advertisement is a source that convinces people to purchase the product at least once in their lives. Celebrities or personas used in ads may positively influence peoples' buying intention (Shanahan et al., 2019). Consumer buying behaviour should be referred to as the choice to buy a product (Sundararaj & Rejeesh, 2021).

Advertisers are adapting different techniques to create purchase decisions through effective commercial messages. Additionally, market advertisers use celebrities in commercials to sponsor their product image (Alalwan, 2018). The involvement of celebrities affects the buying intention of the consumer. This study shows that advertisements have a positive effect on consumer buying intention. Consequently, Vargas-Bianchi and Mensa (2020) remarked that advertisement has a crucial role in the current age as it is an instrument to build society's behaviour regarding products. Ads help people to get information and make a purchasing decision. People's psychological, emotional, and behavioural aspects are important while making a purchasing decision (Wirtz et al., 2017). Consumer buying behaviour can be predicted by relevant brand awareness in the market (Alalwan, 2018). In conclusion, advertisement has a direct relation with consumer buying behaviour. If advertisement increases, it will eventually lead toward an increase in buying intention of the consumer. Advertisers use celebrity endorsements in their advertisements to sway customer attitudes (Gilal et al., 2020). Celebrities are people who are well-known among the general public for reasons other than their support of certain brands or goods (Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020). Advertisers' employment of celebrity has a great impact on consumers' attitudes about advertising (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019). Only when a well-known celebrity is supporting an advertisement will people buy the goods, regardless of whether or not they know anything about them. Popular celebrity endorsement affects buying intention more than unknown celebrity endorsement (Yang, 2018).

According to the experts who conducted the experiments cited above, celebrity endorsements have a favourable effect on customers' purchasing intentions (Zhang et al., 2020). According to McCracken (1989, p.310) a celebrity endorser is "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement." Researchers have identified many factors which are favourably influenced by celebrity endorsers. Some of the major factors include awareness of the brand and company, company image, believability, attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions (Atkin & Block, 1983; Erdogan, 1999; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Friedman et al., 1976; Kamen et al., 1975; Ohanian, 1990). There are four main models that explain the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers. Source credibility model states that the credibility of the source/endorser from which the message originates will determine the effectiveness of the advertisement and because celebrities are generally considered credible by the audience, the message originating from them is evaluated positively. According to Hovland et al. (1953) perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the source are two main factors from which credibility of the source originates. The source attractiveness model postulates that the attractiveness of the source induces positive attitude and behavioural intentions towards the advertisement and the brand (Friedman & Friedman, 1979; McGuire, 1985). Celebrities, especially from the field of entertainment are considered attractive than typical endorsers, therefore using them as endorsers have been supported by various studies.

The match-up hypothesis states that a celebrity endorsement will be effective only if there is a similarity/congruence between the celebrity and the product (Forkan, 1980; Kamins, 1989, 1990). The match-up between the celebrity and the product can be attractiveness based, expertise-based or image-based. Using attractive celebrity for attractiveness related product is attractiveness-based match-up, for example, Aishwarya Rai for Nakshatra diamonds. Expertise match-up involves using a celebrity endorser, who is perceived as an expert of the product or belongs to same field for example, Virat Kohli for ADIDAS. Image-based match-up is matching the associations of the celebrity with that of the brand, for example Shahrukh Khan for Hyundai Santro. Lastly, meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989) states that because consumers not only consume the product but also the meanings associated with it, the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement depend upon the cultural meanings which the celebrity transfers to the product. According to the model, the celebrity first earns cultural meanings through his/her respective career, for example movie performances, sports achievements, etc. These meanings then get transferred to the product through the endorsement process. Finally, the consumers consume the product in order to take on the cultural meanings which the product holds. Considering the popularity of celebrity endorsers in India, some studies have also tried to analyse their use. Khan and Khan (2002) conducted a content analysis of 250 TV advertisements and reported that 50% of the advertisements featured celebrities. Celebrity endorsers were mostly used for personal appearance products followed by medicine and toiletries and home products, appliances and furnishing. However, they did not report a significant association between various product categories and celebrity use.

Prakash et al. (2012) in their study reported 59% use of celebrity endorsers in a sample of 300 TV commercials. The study by AdEx India (India, 2011) reported that celebrity use was highest for shampoos, toilet soaps, aerated soft drinks and cellular phone service in 2010. There are other important aspects like celebrity type and celebrity role that have been studied by the researchers. For example, Khan and Khan (2002) found that film stars (43%) were the most featured celebrity type followed by TV (34%) and sports celebrities (7%). Statistically significant association between celebrity type and various product categories was also reported by them. Film celebrities were used more than TV and sports celebrities for medicine and toiletries, drinks and confectioneries and personal appearance while TV celebrities were used more in case of home products, appliances and furnishing.

Sports celebrities were used mostly for drinks and confectionary items. AdEx India (India, 2011) also reported that the film celebrities accounted for 85% of total celebrity endorsements on TV during December–January 2010 followed by sports and TV celebrities. Prakash et al. (2012) found that film celebrities accounted for approximately 52% share of celebrity commercials, TV and sports celebrities accounted for 23% and 16% share respectively. They also reported statistically significant relation between celebrity type and product category.

Another important aspect regarding the use of celebrity endorsers is celebrity role, i.e., way of portraying/depicting the celebrity in an advertisement. Celebrities can give a testimonial or endorsement, can be an actor in the ad or can be a company spokesperson (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1995). If the celebrity endorser states the benefits of the product on the basis of his knowledge or experience of using the product it is called as testimonial. Endorsement is when the celebrity just lends his/her name to a product and actor means celebrity laying a character in the commercial. If a celebrity keeps on representing a company or a brand for a longer period of time and he becomes closely associated with the brand or the company then he is called as company spokesperson (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1995). Khan and Khan (2002) reported that celebrities were mostly used as actors (54%) followed by testimonial/endorser (42%) and company spokesperson (4%) in TV commercials. However, they did not find statistically significant relation between the celebrity role and various product categories. Celebrity role can also be classified as explicit, imperative, implicit and co-present mode (McCracken, 1989). In explicit mode the celebrity overtly declares that he or she is endorsing the product ('I endorse this product'). When a celebrity suggests the consumers to use the product it is imperative mode ('You should use this product'). In implicit mode the celebrity uses physical or verbal communication ('I use this product') and co-present mode is when the celebrity only appears with the product (McCracken, 1989). Jain et al. (2010) in their analysis of celebrity advertisements which were aired on television during 1995 to 2007 in India found that in 64% of celebrity commercials implicit mode of portraying the celebrity was used followed by imperative (20%) and co-present mode (14.5%). Explicit mode was used only in 1% celebrity commercials. In India the practise is quite popular. Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) reported that 60% of Indian brands used celebrity endorsers in 2008, in 2001 it was only 25% (Shashidhar, 2008). According to AdEx India, TV commercials featuring celebrities witnessed six times increase from 2003 to 2007 and 49% from 2006 to 2007 (India, 2008). More recently, The Financial Express (2013) reported that more than 50% of commercial advertisements feature celebrity endorsers.

Changing Role of Authority Figures in Indian Advertising

More realistic and balanced picture of Indian women:

It's quite evident when taking look at some of the advertisements being shown on Indian Television;

- A. *HERO HONDA PLEASURE (Why should boys have all the fun)*- This advertisement advocates women empowerment. Here a flock of girls is shown which epitomizes group will and freedom of movement. Today women have stepped out; realizing their potential in fulfilling their dreams and for them, driving a vehicle is one of the symbols of liberty and fun. This ad completely breaks the notion that outdoor fun is only a domain of men.
- B. *ICICI PRUDENTIAL LIFE INSURANCE (Jeetey Raho)*- In this advertisement, a young couple is seen where a wife asks husband to sign the life insurance papers. In the next frame, she cleverly and logically explains the benefits of taking insurance. This advertisement projects a progressive change in our society where the woman is accepted as the chief catalyst in taking financial decisions.
- C. *ARIEL DETERGENT (Ariel ki safai do khusboo mein aaye)*- This ad uses the slice of life concept where has returned home from work and comes across a message from his wife that she would be late from work. He then prepares dinner and drops some curry on his shirt and washes it himself. This advertisement has broken the myth that only women are supposed to do household work.
- D. *ASMI DIAMOND JEWELLERY (I believe in me)* - Kajol is viewed as a woman who is traditional yet fully capable of participating in the modern world. Her modernity does not necessarily mean divorce from traditional ethos. She is the brand ambassador of Asmi and provides assurance to the target audience that wants to do things differently without breaking from the past. Here she says she does not believe in stars, talking parrots and crystal balls but believes in herself.
- E. *FEMINA (Believe)*- "I am dark, fair, 14, fat, 40, I love..." If we go through this advertisement, an emphatic I am revealed. Today's woman is confident and comfortable with what she is and is unapologetic about carrying the weight of her „self“. This ad makes minimum use of visual imagery-just the face of protagonist infusing confidence and warmth.

These are some advertisements, which depict the changing face of women in Indian advertising. There are many more ads and everyday one new ad is surfacing which clearly depict the increasing influence of women in Indian Television and society.

Ordinary looking models now crowd ad agencies

Airtel 's 4G can be included in one of the most successful ad campaigns by brands at one point. It was only a few years back when Airtel introduced its 4G network in the country. After a few years of the network's launch, came a face that got associated with the brand so well that people saw her as the brand herself. Every household and people of all ages knew her face even if they didn't know her name. Sasha Chettri became a name known to all. Having featured in nearly 50 ad campaigns, including Maruti, NIIT, Pantaloon and *Indiatimes.com*, Chetan Sethi, 32, is a busy model. And an even busier tax lawyer with a flourishing practice in the capital. Rajni Nijhawan, 34, is vice-president, business development, with an immigration consultancy firm in Delhi. But most people recognize her as the house wife with the "glowing" face in the commercial for Hindustan Lever's Dove soap. Presenting the deglamorized face of Indian advertising. These are not regular Milind Soman, Madhu Sapre or Rahul Dev. The model is not someone off the catwalk. She could be your grandmother. Advertisers and advertisement agencies are increasingly using ordinary people as models in advertisements to infuse a sense of realism in their campaigns.

Greying grandparents, bored officegoers, housewives with time on their hand and pesky brats are peddling wares more than ever before, cutting across socioeconomic and psychographic demographics. In the process they have shattered stereotypes like the brawny, 6-ft-tall dude or the sculpted, glamorous girl. Much of this shift could be due to the growing need to bring consumers closer to the product being advertised. Using deglamorized models to endorse a product is to make the consumer associate himself (okay, her-self) with the person in the ad.

Transformation to the Digital Age

Fast forward to the digital age, where social media rules the roost. Suddenly, everyone has a voice, and the line between celebrity and influencer is blurred. We don't just admire our Bollywood stars; we also follow Instagram influencers who share every facet of their lives, from fashion choices to diet plans. According to a Statista report, the country's social network users are expected to reach roughly 1.5 billion by 2040 due to the accessibility of the internet. According to the report, the federal government's Digital India effort has improved the availability and accessibility of the internet, which has resulted in a direct correlation between the growth of social media users and the tremendous growth of the digital marketing sector. Simply put, digital marketing is promoting a product through the internet or other forms of electronic media. The global digital marketing industry has a significant impact on the country's digital marketing market, as per the Expert Market Research analysis. According to this analysis, the sector is growing at a CAGR of 17.6% and is expected to be more than \$930 billion by 2026. The key driver of the sector is the growing global population's preference for digital social media platforms. Consumers have never had more opportunities thanks to social networking, which has upended many industries. Influencer marketing is a good illustration of this, as it allows previously unidentified consumers to enhance and, in some instances, outperform traditional marketing initiatives.

The Rise of Micro-Influencers

In this new era, brands are no longer relying solely on A-list celebrities. They're turning to micro-influencers – individuals with a smaller but highly engaged following. These micro-influencers feel like friends, and their endorsement of a product doesn't feel forced. It's more like a recommendation from someone you trust. For instance, a fashion brand might collaborate with a niche fashion blogger who has a dedicated following interested in sustainable fashion. Their endorsement feels more relatable and authentic compared to a traditional celebrity.

Authenticity Is Key

Today's consumers are savvy. They can spot a forced celebrity endorsement from a mile away. What they crave is authenticity. They want to see their favourite stars and influencers genuinely using and loving a product. This shift has led to brands collaborating with celebrities and influencers who align with their values. For example, when Virat Kohli promotes a fitness brand, it aligns perfectly with his image as a fitness-conscious athlete. It feels authentic because consumers know he's genuinely passionate about fitness.

Commercials talk about ideas and brand values with the pinch of Social Awareness

Celebrity endorsements in India have also evolved to embrace social issues. From endorsing girl child education to promoting eco-friendly products, celebrities are using their influence to create positive change. This shift towards socially responsible endorsements is a reflection of the changing values of Indian consumers. For instance, when Deepika

Padukone speaks about mental health awareness, it resonates with the audience, and it's more than just a product endorsement – it's a message of social significance. One of the first and most-fashionable trends or practices that are followed by advertisers. They are coming with commercials on various social issues, political, environmental, health and other issues, getting people to think about social concerns, which are important for rising public supporting and affecting meaningful changes. For instance, in Tata tea ads instead of talking directly about tea product, it creates awareness about the value of one vote, which is completely different from traditional ads. Not for a single moment, Tata tea discusses the product's quality and the question raised here that why should buyers buy only Tata tea since potential buyers don't get the details about the quality of this product. There are several brands of tea. It's interesting to observe the shifting patterns of ads filmmaking. Now ads don't talk directly about the product's features. In Tata tea case, Tata Company is promoting the 'brands large value' while creating awareness about the civil rights and values of election voting. Indirectly, these brands are creating good values for their products. Buyers buy a certain product because of the particular brand values.

Conclusion

India, a land of diverse cultures and traditions, has always had a soft spot for celebrities. Be it our favourite Bollywood actors or cricket stars, we've admired them, emulated their style, and followed their choices. And somewhere along the way, clever marketers realized that attaching a celebrity's name to a product can work wonders. Back in the day, celebrity endorsements in India primarily meant Bollywood stars gracing our television screens, endorsing everything from toothpaste to tea. Remember the iconic "Lalitaji" from Surf washing powder ads? That was the era when the power of a celebrity's endorsement could make or break a brand. The underlying principle was trust. When Amitabh Bachchan told us to use a certain brand of cement, we trusted that it was the best. Celebrities were seen as experts in everything, and their word was gold. But times were simpler then, and the advertising world was a different ball game. So, what does the future hold for celebrity endorsements in India? Well, it's safe to say that while the landscape has changed, the influence of celebrities and influencers remains strong. However, authenticity, alignment with values, and a genuine connection with the audience will be the keys to success. In this ever-evolving world of advertising, one thing remains constant – the love and admiration Indians have for their stars. Whether it's a Bollywood legend like Shah Rukh Khan endorsing a luxury brand or a social media sensation like Bhuvan Bam promoting a new-age tech gadget, celebrity endorsements will continue to shape our buying decisions, but in a more authentic and relatable way. After all, in a country where cinema is a religion, celebrities will always be more than just faces on a billboard; they'll be our guides, our inspirations, and sometimes, even our friends.

Future Implications & Limitations

The major challenge of the future is likely to be the ability to meet competitive threats from a variety of competitors; from small scale to multinationals. The need to offer the consumer a better choice than the competition and yet make a profit will be the basis of all marketing challenges. Market conditions will continue to be more competitive and manufacturers will have to place greater emphasis on quality. Clients are going to demand effectiveness of advertising and most cost-effective advertising.

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