A time comes when silence becomes betrayal: the Indian expatriate perspective of social marketing

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Abstract: This study examines the role and impact of celebrity endorsed social marketing and its ability to create behavioural change, from an Indian-expatriate perspective. It concludes that not only are celebrities perceived as enablers of social change, but also that the younger generation of Indian expatriates believe this to be one of the core responsibilities of these personalities. In line with extant literature, the study finds that celebrities have a two-fold impact on social marketing: 1) increased awareness of the cause and increased influence over the audience; 2) endorser credibility and source-message congruence, and the lack thereof, respectively enhance or erode campaign effectiveness. The study offers several new insights,
including the potential for celebrity attractiveness to weaken social message credibility, and exposure of the ‘reverse vampire effect’. Managerial implications suggest first, the need for distinction between social marketing and social media, and second, that source credibility is critical to campaign effectiveness.

**Keywords:** celebrity endorsement; celebrity responsibility; social marketing; cause-related marketing; sustainability; sustainable marketing; sustainable society; behavioural change; celebrity source models; celebrity selection models; persuasion models; India; Indian perspective; Indian expatriates.


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1 Introduction

Celebrity endorsement (CE) of brands is not a novel concept and there exists an extensive body of literature exploring the interaction between celebrities and brands, and the role of celebrities as facilitators of marketing communication (Kambitsis et al., 2002). The endorser’s influence over enhanced message recall (Friedman and Friedman, 1979), brand recognition (Petty et al., 1983), attitudes towards the brand and the ad (Atkin and Block, 1983) and overall effectiveness due to congruence between the brand and the celebrity (Kamins and Gupta, 1994) are amongst some of the many themes explored. More recently, however, there has been an increased interest in the role of celebrities endorsing not-for-profit causes (Park, 2017). Park (2017) remarks, “using celebrities to raise awareness and funds for socially worthy causes is a popular technique these days” (p.8). In common with early research, the focus of these studies has been transactional, albeit focusing on the influence of endorsement on intentions to donate, rather than purchase. Studies examining the role of CE in bringing about socially responsible behavioural change, however, remain elusive (Bergkvist et al., 2016; Little, 2008; Samman et al., 2009). Amongst the few studies that exist, the majority have focused on mature, Western contexts (Brown and Basil, 1995; Dejong and Atkin, 1995; Dejong and Hingson, 1998; Peattie and Peattie, 2009; Rao and Johal, 2009). This study attempts to address this contextual gap by examining the Indian expatriate perspective of the role of celebrities in social marketing (SM), defined by Kotler and Zaltman (1971, p.3) as “the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify or abandon a behaviour for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole”.

The focus of the study is on the views of Indian-expatriates residing in the UAE, a sample chosen for three reasons: first, expatriate influence over the social fabric of the homeland is significant and multi-dimensional (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). There are approximately 2.6 million Indians residing the in UAE (Embassy of India, 2016), who, in 2013, repatriated USD 15 billion (KaderStaff, 2014), accounting for over 20% of total inflows to the country, from non-resident Indians. These financial remittances are often used as ‘social insurance’, anticipating the country’s future needs [Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, (2011), p.2]. Kurien (2008) cited in Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) studies how remittances are spent in three Indian villages, and concludes that depending on the sender’s faith, the money was either distributed to community members, spent on life-cycle rituals or on supporting family expenses, such as dowry and education. More subtle, but equally important, expatriates carry with them social remittances (Conway et al., 2012; Levitt, 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011), defined by Levitt (1998, p.926) as “the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities”. The exchange of social remittance takes place when visiting the homeland, when communicating with those in the homeland, and upon a
A time comes when silence becomes betrayal

The relative paucity of studies examining the role of celebrity endorsed social marketing (CESM) campaigns in bringing about socially responsible behavioural change, together with the intrinsic value and novelty of exploring the views of the Indian-expatriate community within the UAE, provide the justification for this study, which sets out to:

1. identify which source characteristics are perceived as influential in both brand and SM campaigns (RO1)
2. identify the most influential celebrities and the most critical social causes in India (RO2)
3. assess perceptions regarding the role of celebrities in enhancing the profile of social causes, consequently determining the scope of marketing in eliciting behavioural and social change (RO3).

This article is structured as follows: first, an analysis of existing literature and its gaps are introduced, reiterating the justification for this study’s research objectives. Then, the methodology of the study is presented, followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions. The final section of the article offers theoretical and managerial implications of the findings, an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study, and a proposal for future research.

2 Literature review

This literature review starts by introducing the concept of CE and its models. This is followed by an analysis of SM and CESM. The literature concludes by further contextualising the research objectives in relation to the examination of CE and CESM from an Indian-expatriate perspective.

2.1 Celebrity endorsement in marketing

With applications as far back as the 18th century, CE is by no means a new concept (Seno and Lukas, 2007). It is defined by McCracken (1989) as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement”. Similarly, Stafford et al. (2003, p.13) describe CE as, “a famous person who uses public recognition to recommend or co-present with a
product in an ad”. In a more recent review of the CE literature, Bergkvist (2016) notes that the role of the celebrity in marketing communication now extends beyond advertising to include social media interactions and celebrity-owned brands. It also encompasses the endorsement of “business-to-business products and services, consumer services, non-commercial entities such as political parties, and non-profit organisations” (p.643–644). Consequently, he proposes a more inclusive interpretation, where CE is defined as “an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity” (p.644). Nevertheless, it is a consistent theme in all three definitions that the association between the famous individual and the entity, whether a brand or social cause, drives the endorsement process and influences its success.

2.2 Celebrity endorsement models

Three distinct categories of models have emerged which seek to explain how the CE process works: Source, Selection and Persuasion Models. The first two focus on the characteristics of the source and degree of ‘fit’ between the endorser’s characteristics and the message endorsed, and the latter concentrates more on the process of bringing about attitudinal and behaviour change. These models are discussed below.

2.2.1 Source models

These explain the impact of source characteristics (i.e., the celebrity) on consumer attitudes, and maintain that the characteristics of the communication source (e.g., credibility, attractiveness or congruence) have a positive effect on message acceptance. In an analysis, Fang and Jiang (2015) note that these models neglect to consider interactions with the target audience, and are therefore limited in scope. The source models are further discussed in Table 1.

Table 1 Source models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The source credibility model</td>
<td>Asserts that expertise and trustworthiness determine the credibility of both the endorser and the communicated message (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Expertise is found to be a key determinant of message credibility (Ohanian, 1990)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The source attractiveness model</td>
<td>Posits that similarity, familiarity and likeability culminate in consumer affection for a celebrity, and translate to the brand endorsed [McGuire (1985) cited in Erdogan (1999, p.299)]. Attractive endorsers are found to be more effective at creating the purchase decision, as compared with their non-attractive counterparts (Baker and Churchill, 1977; Friedman et al., 1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The product match-up hypothesis</td>
<td>Maintains that congruence between endorser and message is critical to the effectiveness of the communicated message (Amos et al., 2008; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Kamins, 1990; Misra and Beatty, 1990). Park (2017, p.9) finds that “celebrities are more effective endorsers when they are personally connected to a cause”.</td>
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2.2.2 Selection models

Given the high investment costs associated with CE, coupled with the opportunity cost of an endorsement gone wrong, a robust, scientific, data-driven process is necessary to guide the selection process (Fang and Jiang, 2015). The celebrity selection models addressed in Table 2 highlight the multitude of factors to consider when zeroing in on the right celebrity for an endorsement.

Table 2 Selection models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>The performer Q rating model</td>
<td>Demonstrates a two-dimensional interaction between celebrity popularity and celebrity familiarity, where a high score demonstrates greater regard for the celebrity within the group to whom he is familiar (Belch and Belch, 2001).</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRED model</td>
<td>Emphasises the importance of the celebrity’s perceived familiarity, relevance, esteem, and differentiation in the selection process (Dyson and Turco, 1998).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4F’s model</td>
<td>Highlights the interaction between fit, fame, facets and finance, when choosing the appropriate celebrity for an endorsement (Pringle, 2004).</td>
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2.2.3 Persuasion models

The models in Table 3 illustrate how the endorsement process translates to audience acceptance of the message. According to Benoit and Benoit (2008) cited in Fang and Jiang (2015, p.154), persuasion can be defined as “a process in which a source (persuader) uses a message to achieve a goal by creating, changing or reinforcing attitudes of others (the audience)”. Similarly, Schacter et al. (2011) cited in Fang and Jiang (2015, p.154) suggest that “persuasion can also be interpreted as using one’s personal or positional resources to change people’s behaviours or attitudes”. In the context of CE, persuasion is successful when a change in attitude, and subsequent change in behaviour, is brought about by the communication source.

Whilst there are areas of overlap, the three aforementioned models can be seen as complementary rather than competing, each providing a slightly different lens through which to view CE. However, the persuasion models can be considered more comprehensive in terms of explaining the CE process: i.e., how behavioural and attitudinal changes can be effected.

Table 3 Persuasion models

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Elaboration likelihood model (ELM)</td>
<td>Emphasises two tools in message processing based on 1 the content of the message, the central route 2 of secondary cues contained within the message, the peripheral route (Petty et al., 1983).</td>
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The level of involvement with the message determines the intensity of information processing (de los Salmones and Dominguez, 2016; Petty et al., 1983). When involvement with the message is high, the central route to persuasion is more effective in creating and maintaining behavioural change (Bian and Moutinho, 2011), the core directive of SM (Andreasen, 1994; Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). Conversely, when involvement is lower, external cues such as ‘music, humour or celebrities’ may be more effective [de los Salmones and Dominguez, (2016), p.311].
Table 3  Persuasion models (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic-systematic model</td>
<td>Theorises that ‘heuristic’ persuasion is centred around changing attitudes and beliefs with appeals to habit or emotion, whereas ‘systematic’ persuasion is focused on changing attitudes and beliefs by appealing to reason and logic (Fang and Jiang, 2015).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social attribution theory</td>
<td>Posits that the audience assigns intentions to celebrities when they endorse a brand or cause, and that they aim to determine the reasons for this advocacy (Heider, 1958). When the audience perceives the celebrity to be “driven by extrinsic motives, such as money or fame, the source is perceived as less credible” [Park, (2017), p.12].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social influence theory</td>
<td>Identifies the source characteristics of credibility, attractiveness, and power, which, through the processes of internalisation, identification and compliance respectively, influence consumer behaviour (Belch and Belch, 2001; Kelman, 1961). Compliance is achieved because consumers simultaneously strive for rewards while evading punishment (Belch and Belch, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parasocial dynamic</td>
<td>Refers to a relationship in which one party is significantly more invested and involved than the other (Donald and Wohl, 1956). Celebrities with whom viewers have established a relationship of this nature, present unique opportunities for the endorsement of socially responsible messages (Shead et al., 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive response model</td>
<td>Postulates that behavioural change occurs only if the audience has an affirmative response to the communicated message (Perloff and Brock, 1980).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance theory</td>
<td>Explains the need to uphold consistency between linked thoughts, achieved if the audience perceives the celebrity and message endorsed as ‘equally balanced’ [Knoll and Matthes, (2017), p.57], i.e., equally positive or negative.</td>
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</table>

2.3 Social marketing

Andreasen (1994) suggests that SM “is the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences, to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part” (p.110). Indeed, according to Peattie and Peattie (2009), SM aims to promote or ‘de-market’ specific behaviours. Similarly, Htat et al. (2015, p.115) suggest that SM focuses on behavioural change ‘for social good’, benefitting the wellbeing and welfare of individuals and society (Dann, 2008; Truong, 2014; Gordon et al., 2006; Peattie and Peattie, 2009). As proposed by Dibb and Carrigan (2013), SM can be viewed as “an innovative approach to social change” (p.1379), taking place on three different levels: downstream, influencing behaviour of the target audience, mid-stream, affecting peers of the target audience, or upstream, impacting the organisations which influence the target audience to change their behaviour.
SM research is still in a relatively nascent stage (Park, 2017), with the majority of studies addressing healthcare concerns (Arulmani and Abdulla, 2007). Peattie and Peattie (2009) note the link between healthcare issues and societal wellbeing or social sustainability, stating that “the use of social marketing in relation to the promotion of sustainability is already well established. The health campaigns that are mainstay of the social marketing discipline all aim to deliver quality-of-life and well-being benefits that are central to the concept of sustainability” (p.261). Despite drawing attention to the success achieved in healthcare related SM, Peattie and Peattie (2009) acknowledge that it may be easier to bring about behavioural change in a context where there is a strong element of inherent self-interest.

Over time, however, other societal concerns have also been embraced by SM. In a systematic review of SM research, Truong (2014) identifies that beside healthcare, studies in the areas of public safety, environmental protection, tourism leisure, civil society, organ and blood donation, poverty alleviation and community outreach, themes critical to social sustainability, have been conducted. It is clear, however, that there is much more to be done and many more sectors to consider.

2.4 Celebrity endorsed social marketing

The application of CE to SM is a relatively under-explored, yet intricate phenomenon. This complexity is, in part, a function of the multitude of variables involved in SM campaigns success. As Helmin and Thaler (2010) observe, the success of SM campaigns is influenced by numerous variables, including intentional change of attitudes and behaviours, knowledge and recall, awareness, beliefs and personal risks, among others, and therefore extensive further testing is required. An additional issue relates to the difficulties of establishing reliable predictors of behavioural response and the so-called attitude-behaviour gap. This is illustrated by Wadhera (2016, p.8), who, in her study of Amitabh Bachchan’s Pulse Polio campaign in India, finds a statistically significant “difference between what people accept in principle, and how they really behave”.

CESM campaigns are associated with similar benefits and risks as their brand-based counterparts. In her study of celebrity involvement with charitable causes, Littler (2008) identifies several advantages. First, celebrities, due to their inherent fame, can raise the awareness of a message, in much the same way they would do for a brand. Second, the celebrity can appeal to a wider audience than only those involved with a cause: their own fan base (Littler, 2008). Third, a celebrity can attract funding for a cause, a dimension often overlooked in SM due to its objective of behavioural change (Andreasen, 1994).

Littler (2008) also identifies several weaknesses of CESM. In line with La Ferle et al. (2013) and Samman et al. (2009), Littler (2008) suggests that because celebrities have self-promoting intentions, they tend to choose causes based on those expected to receive most media coverage, rather than those requiring the most attention. Also, she draws attention to the potential for celebrities to overshadow the communicated message, thus weakening the campaign. Erdogan (1999, p.296) refers to this as the ‘vampire effect’. Wadhera’s (2016) study provides a useful illustration of this, with participants more readily recalling the endorser, rather than the campaign’s call to action.

Table 4 presents a summary of previous investigations of CESM campaigns, the majority of which have been conducted in mature, Western contexts. Analysis shows that evidence regarding the effectiveness of CESM campaigns is somewhat mixed. Myrick
and Evans (2014) find that “there was no significant difference in the effect of the celebrity and non-celebrity PSAs on intentions to support shark conservation” (p.560). Indeed, Knoll and Matthes (2017) go as far as to suggest that endorsements by external bodies (i.e., quality seals and awards) may be more effective than celebrities, in eliciting favourable attitudes.

Table 4 Overview CESM campaigns and their outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political movements (Veer et al., 2010)</td>
<td>Individuals are more favourable towards a particular political party when a CE is used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-drinking and driving campaigns (Dejong and Atkin, 1995; Dejong and Hingson, 1998; Dejong and Winsten, 1990)</td>
<td>Madonna’s association with Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) resulted in increased awareness for the campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV awareness programmes (Brown and Basil, 1995; Casais and Proenca, 2012)</td>
<td>A 10-fold increase in the number of phone calls to the National AIDS Hotline in the USA, following Magic Johnson’s 1991 declaration of being HIV positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-smoking movements (Oei and Baldwin, 1992; Seghers and Poland, 1998; Chapman and Leask, 2001; Peattie and Peattie, 2009)</td>
<td>‘Mobley Kicks Butts’ campaign revealed a 32% increase in viewership intention to abandon the habit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty-reduction efforts (Samman et al., 2009; Littler, 2008; Rao and Johal, 2009)</td>
<td>CESM is perceived by the audience to be a win-win situation for the celebrity and cause.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, there are several studies that point to potentially beneficial effects of CESM. Hans and Gupta (2013), for example, conclude that CESM campaigns are more effective than their non-celebrity counterparts, and Pease and Brewer’s (2008) study investigating the effects of Oprah’s endorsement of Barak Obama, finds that “reading about the endorsement did lead participants to say they would be more likely to vote for him” (p.386). Similarly, in exploring the relationship between celebrity endorsers and unpopular political statements, Jackson and Darrow (2005) find that the former renders the latter more palatable to US youth. This finding is particularly relevant in the case of celebrities creating awareness for unpleasant, uncomfortable discussion topics such as honor killings and female infanticide, prevalent in an Indian context (The Telegraph, 2012).

2.5 Celebrity endorsement in an Indian context

India has a sizeable advertising industry. According to the India Brand Equity Foundation (2016), this was expected to reach a value of USD 7.5 billion in 2016, and it is estimated that between USD 200 million and 217 million is spent on brand endorsement (Sahey and Sahey, 2013; Aggarwal-Gupta and Dang, 2009). CE is becoming increasingly popular in India (Patra and Datta, 2010), evidenced by Aggarwal-Gupta and Dang’s (2009) study, concluding that celebrities appeared in 24% of advertisements in 2008, with other sources putting this figure even higher, at over 50% (The Financial Express, 2013). These figures can be attributed to the importance given to status and position in an Indian context,
A time comes when silence becomes betrayal of the subcontinent’s power-distance dimension.

Film celebrities have always been intrinsic to India’s social and cultural fabric, and are gaining further popularity with appearances on television shows, talk shows and in advertisements (Jain et al., 2015). Patra’s (2012) study highlights that film celebrities accounted for a majority (81%) of CE on TV in 2007, involving actors such as Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan. A further 14% of endorsements involved athletes (e.g., Mahinder Singh Dhoni), while the remaining 5% used TV personalities (Patra and Datta, 2010). The popularity of CE in India is not without its difficulties, and carries with it two negative consequences:

1. Celebrity overexposure due to multiple brand endorsements
2. The potential for celebrities to overshadow the brand (Patra and Datta, 2010).

2.6 Celebrity endorsed social marketing in an Indian context

Application of CE to SM campaigns is especially rare in an Indian context (Patra, 2012, 2010; Kotler et al., 2007). Amitabh Bachchan advocating the importance of Polio vaccinations and Aishwarya Rai supporting eye donation are amongst some of the few reported examples (The Telegraph, 2012; Kotler et al., 2007). The distinct lack of celebrity affiliation with issues seen as controversial, such as abortion, female infanticide, and gender equality (The Telegraph, 2012) can be explained by reference to India’s culture. The subcontinent displays a rich cultural heritage, yet remains a relatively conservative country, with great emphasis placed on the dutiful roles and responsibilities of its people. This has led directly to the suppression of discussions around rampant, yet relevant realities (Chavan, 2009; La Ferle et al., 2013). According to Wasan and Tripathi (2014, p.130), issues with social stigmas attached to them are “also provoked by corruption, illiteracy, and poverty”.

Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions. Aamir Khan’s successful TV venture titled ‘Satyamev Jayate’ (the truth alone triumphs) serves to demonstrate the potential celebrities have to influence public opinion and bring about social change. Using a talk show created to shed light on social issues such as female infanticide, child abuse, and the caste and dowry systems, the film star served as a catalyst for the creation of a fast-track court to hear female infanticide cases (News18, 2012). It is precisely this potential for CE to bring about social and behavioural change, as opposed to merely creating transactions (Jackson and Darrow, 2005; Kotler and Zaltman, 1971; Samman et al., 2009), coupled with the lack of CESM campaigns, and the dearth of studies examining perceptions of CESM in an Indian context, that provide the justification for this study.

3 Methodology

This study adopts an interpretive philosophy, and focuses on understanding phenomena in their in their naturally occurring contexts (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). This is coupled with an inductive approach, acknowledging that the analysis and interpretation of research findings is inherently subjective (O’Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015).
cross-sectional study is primarily a qualitative one, albeit with some quantitative elements (e.g., ranking questions). The analyses therefore rely on elaborate interpretation, rather than numerical measurement (Hassan, 2011).

The study employs a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suited to studies which have an exploratory purpose, where there is a need to understand the interaction between phenomena and their naturally occurring contexts (Saunders et al., 2012).

The research focuses on the views of Indian expatriates living in the UAE, who account for approximately 30% of the UAE population, 65% and 35% of which are blue collar and white collar workers, respectively (Embassy of India, 2015). The significance of the Indian expatriate community in Dubai, both in terms of its size and composition, combined with its potential for social and financial remittances aiding in developing a sustainable society, make it worthy of study.

A total of 20 interviews were conducted with all participants consenting to being recorded. The open-ended questions were organised around the focused research objective, the interviews were transcribed and the responses thematically coded, following the process outlined by O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015).

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, whereby participants were selected for their ability to give insights into the research questions, rather than for their representativeness of a broader population (Saunders et al., 2012). Ease of access and inclination to contribute were nevertheless key factors in selection, leading to a largely convenience-based sample (Easterby-Smith et al., 2009).

Participants were all Indian expatriates, living in Dubai, UAE, between the ages of 25 and 35, chosen primarily due to the younger generation’s aspiration for change. To account for any gender bias, the sample comprised of ten males and ten females, all of whom were undergraduate degree holders, presenting the study with a sample of educated individuals.

4 Findings and discussion

This study set out to examine the role of CE in SM campaigns in India. Specifically, the study assesses the participants’ understanding of CE and SM, the effect celebrity source characteristics have on message acceptance, the most influential celebrities and the most relevant causes in India, and the scope celebrities have to elicit socially responsible behaviour. The key findings of each objective are discussed below.

ROI1 To identify which source characteristics are perceived as influential in both brand and SM campaigns.

While 70% of participants (n = 14) perceived celebrity attractiveness as the most influential source characteristic when endorsing a brand, only 35% (n = 7) looked for corresponding source trustworthiness. This aligns with Baker and Churchill (1977) and Friedman et al. (1976), who find that attractive endorsers are more effective at creating the purchase decision. By contrast, echoing the findings of de los Salmones et al. (2013), this study concludes that celebrity credibility, specifically source trustworthiness, is seen as most critical to 85% of the participants (n = 17), in the endorsement of SM campaigns, while only 5% (n = 1) looked for corresponding source attractiveness.
As one participant stated, “I think qualities such as sincerity, trustworthiness, reliability, honesty would stand out far more than the aesthetic value of that person because it’s needed to bring in change within people”. This is in line with Park’s (2017) findings, that source credibility is paramount to message acceptance in SM. Adding to analyses of celebrity source characteristics, 10% of participants (n = 2) indeed believed that source attractiveness hinders SM campaign effectiveness. One participant stated, “you cannot have a hot model that’s half naked trying to sell a cause. No one’s even going to listen to it when they are watching it on TV”.

For both brand and SM campaigns alike, participants identify the source characteristics of hypocrisy, dishonesty, endorser-brand/cause mismatch and negative public image as most damaging to an endorsement. As one participant commented, “for actors who are known to support their religion (Islam), advertising an alcohol brand did not make sense to me… so I think that covers hypocrisy at a big level”. In an SM context, another participant reiterated, “someone who has nothing to do with that campaign, with that cause, you know, for example, let’s say, something that they haven’t been involved in, something that hasn’t affected them… will undermine it”. Similarly, 75% of participants (n = 15) were able to relay true to life examples of source-message incongruity having damaging effects on the campaign’s message. These findings concur with those of Till and Shimp (1998) who suggest a direct relationship between negative celebrity image and brand image, and those of Knoll and Matthes (2017), which suggest that “congruent endorsers perform better than incongruent endorsers do” (p.67). Furthermore, they illustrate that brand endorsement literature of negative source characteristics may be extended to the study of SM.

Consistent with the literature, this study finds that multiple brand endorsements lead to negative associations with celebrities (Knoll and Matthes, 2017). In stating “it just shows that the celebrity is only doing it for money”, one participant highlights how social attribution theory (Heider, 1958) translates to real life. Contrastingly, and in relation to SM, one participant specified, “I think it’s fantastic. You’re reaching out to more people, different sects of people, with different problems”, emphasising enhanced respect for the celebrity. A ‘win-win’ relationship is perceived for both for the campaign and the celebrity, as Littler (2008) suggests.

In translating Erdogan’s ‘vampire effect’ (1999, p.296) theory on brand endorsement, to practice, one participant admitted, “because if I really like the celebrity I’m going to really notice the ad for one, and then it’s only the celebrity that I can think of and remember”. Contrastingly, in an SM context, the reverse appears to be true. One respondent declared, “I would remember the cause more than the celebrity”. Thus, while the ‘vampire effect’ [Erdogan, (1999), p.296], remains a definitive risk to brand endorsements, not only does this not appear to be the case in the world of SM, but rather the endorsement serves to boost celebrity image. Uncovering this ‘reverse vampire effect’ adds to the novelty of these findings, and contributes to our understanding particular to CESM.

Consistent with Kamins and Gupta (1994), Earle (2000) and Knoll and Matthes (2017), participants valued a link between celebrity and both brand and campaign cause. Similarly, Park (2017, p.17) notes that “celebrity endorsers yield more favourable attitudinal outcomes when they are personally linked to a cause”. This serves to further underline the importance of source credibility and the principle of congruity, grounded in balance theory (Knoll and Matthes, 2017), as important determinants of success in SM.
One participant affirmed, “maybe because he [MS Dhoni] is from a small village, and within this village there could be violence against women, female infanticide, I think he would be best suited to address these causes”. In this way, the source’s characteristics, in this case, congruence with the cause, may be transferred to the endorsed message, and accepted more willingly. Interestingly however, in a departure from the literature, the findings suggest that the not only does the brand draw on the personality traits of the endorser, but that this transfer of meaning (McCracken, 1989) may in fact be bidirectional, as one participant recounted, “Aishwarya gave the brand [L’Oreal] a pull upward, another brand probably gave a celebrity the pull upward, like Aaliya Bhatt and Garnier”. Indeed, while till date there are only two studies of meaning transfer from brand to celebrity, Arsena et al. (2014) witness brand personality traits being transferred to the celebrity endorser.

RO2 To identify the most influential celebrities and most critical social causes in India.

Participants were asked to name who they perceived to be the most influential Indian celebrity. As can be seen in Table 5, Amitabh Bachchan is perceived to hold this title. In line with the literature, three of the five celebrities mentioned by the participants, Amitabh Bachchan, MS Dhoni and Shah Rukh Khan, are also identified by Aggarwal-Gupta and Dang (2009) as some of the most persuasive celebrity endorsers in the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>The most influential Indian celebrities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Number of times ranked most influential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amitabh Bachchan</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachin Tendulkar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Dhoni</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shah Rukh Khan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salman Khan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For deeper insight into what is seen as critical to India’s social development, participants were asked to rank their five most important concerns out of a group of 18 social issues. They were told that this list was not exhaustive and that they should feel free to identify any other concerns if they wished to; none however, did so. As summarised in Table 6, India’s most critical social problems, based on the number of times they were ranked in the top 5, are: education, corruption, poverty and the caste system.

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Education is a major contributor to human (Agrawal, 2014), economic and social development (Behar, 2016). Agrawal (2014) suggests that it can enhance the well-being of current and future generations due to the spill-over effects of improved income levels, standards of living, individual freedoms, and intergenerational transmissions of knowledge, in their capacity to generate new assets. However, some would argue that education in India is ‘alarming’ (Behar, 2016). Behar (2016) notes that average learning across the best Indian schools, according to the international PISA assessment, benchmarks lower than countries such as Slovenia, Mexico and Italy. He further deduces that the reasons for these scores might be found in the characteristics of India’s school system, which is the largest in the world. It places a large percentage of first-generation school goers, has seen a massive expansion, and knows deep-seated inequity and
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discrimination, while being supported by a ‘super-weak and super-corrupt teacher education system’ (Behar, 2016). Agrawal (2014, p.12) notes the “disparity in educational attainment, between rural and urban population, between males and females, and among social groups and religions”. It is therefore not surprising that India suffers from ‘large social welfare losses’ [Agrawal, (2014), p.13] resulting from this underperforming system.

Table 6  Main obstacles to India’s social progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Number of times ranked in the top 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste System</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male supremacy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse of women</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-population</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honour killings</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in general</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health pandemics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk driving</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female feticide</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exploitation of the education system, as highlighted by Behar (2016), does not stand isolated. India is perceived as corrupt (Riley and Roy, 2016), and is known for scandals on both major and minor scales, of those abusing public powers for personal gain. Agrawal (2012, p.26) refers to corruption as the ‘hallmark of today’s Indian administrative culture’. However, effort has been made to combat corruption, by both societal groups such as the social movement against corruption as discussed by De and Kim (2016), and by legislative powers through the introduction of the Right to Information Act (Agrawal, 2012). However, the outcomes of the fight against corruption, which must focus on changing deeply ingrained habits, combating the pervasiveness of government, minimising crony capitalism and restoring civic faith, are ongoing and uncertain (Riley and Roy, 2016).

Meanwhile, India is also suffering from poverty, a hurdle to sustainability relevant in all countries, albeit to differing degrees (Prusty, 2009). The subcontinent hosts one-third of all poor people in the world (Chauhan et al., 2016). This means that a substantial number of Indians do not have ‘adequate clothing, footwear, durable goods, education and institutional medical expenses’ [Prusty, (2009), p.57]. Chauhan et al. (2016) note that, as with education, there are large disparities in poverty levels within the different
regions of the country. This hints at a vicious cycle: The uptake of education in rural areas is relatively low and hence, so are the literacy levels. However, “literacy helps in the correction of social and regional imbalances and hence, helps in the reduction of poverty” [Prusty, (2009), p.57].

Intrinsically linked with poverty, education and corruption is the existence of the caste system in India. This social classification has existed for thousands of years (Siddique, 2011) and is seen as a ‘central cause of inequality in India’ [Fontaine and Yamada, (2014), p.407] with upper castes often having greater education opportunities. This ‘dividing of society into hierarchical groups by birth’ [Siddique, (2011), p.146] has generated social and political tension in India, and is ultimately about economic and political power in society (Fontaine and Yamada, 2014). The caste system restricts people in all parts of their lives: in their choice of occupation, degree of social interaction, wage earning levels (Siddique, 2011), ultimately affecting their overall well-being (Fontaine and Yamada, 2014). Specifically, the lower castes are “subjected to discrimination, economic and social exclusion and a stigmatized identity” [Sharma, (2015), p.205], and are often the victims of crime.

It is clear that the causes identified by the participants of this study are deep-seated, and have been reinforced over generations. It is almost no surprise then, that in the face of such fundamental unsustainability, social responsibilities such as voting, gender equality and non-violence, are seen as less critical. The lack of education, high poverty levels, rampant corruption, and the mere existence of the caste system, are in fundamental and direct conflict with the development of a sustainable society, and to that extent, need to immediately be addressed.

RO3 To assess perceptions regarding the role of celebrities in enhancing the profile of social causes, consequently determining the scope of marketing in eliciting behavioural and social change.

While participants have an understanding of the strategy of CE, apparent confusion between the concepts of ‘social marketing’ and ‘social media’ emerge. This is not helped by the fact that the term is also rather ambiguously used in marketing practice. For example, the top 100 ‘social brands’, rank brands on the basis of their social media presence, rather than their social consciousness (Social Brands 100, 2014). Participants also view the objective of SM in relatively narrow terms, focusing on message related aspects, rather than long-term behavioural change. According to Andreasen (1994), SM campaign success should be assessed based on witnessed behavioural change, neither easily accomplished nor measured.

Echoing previous works, celebrities are perceived to add value to SM campaigns due to their inherent fame (Littler, 2008). Their impact is seen as two-dimensional, resulting in increased awareness for the cause, as suggested by Littler (2008) and Samman et al. (2009), and increased influence over the audience, as demonstrated by La Ferle et al. (2013) and Shead et al. (2011). In citing the campaign central to Wadhera’s (2016) study, a participant of this study confirmed, “it [Pulse Polio] would not have gained that much traction if it wouldn’t have been for Amitabh Bachchan”. Similarly, in noting celebrity influence over the audience, another participant stated, “I’m Amitabh Bachchan, I’m telling you go do it… Fine, I will, you know”.

The findings shed further light on what types of campaigns are best served by emotional versus informational appeals. Campaigns related to women and children are perceived as more effective with an emotional appeal. One participant recounted, “things
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like, wife-beating, female feticide, rape, abuse of women... the laws are clearly not stopping a lot of people, so maybe this [an emotional appeal] will create more awareness”. The heuristic-systematic model (Fang and Jiang, 2015) dictates that CE is an example of heuristic message processing, best represented by an emotional appeal. ELM theory (Petty et al., 1983) suggests that evaluating message effectiveness based on source rather than content, by very definition implies low involvement with the message. A justification for this may be found in the demographics of the participants, none of whom had children at the time of the study, and none of whom have experience with ‘things like, wife-beating, female feticide, rape, abuse of women’.

By contrast, under-discussed, controversial subjects such as ‘smoking, drugs, alcohol, AIDS’, are determined to be more effectively communicated if supported by an informational appeal. This suggests systematic message processing (Fang and Jiang, 2015), and that in these instances, messaging derives its credibility from data, rather than source. As one participant acknowledged, “you have to persuade them, but then tell them why: these are the numbers, these are the factors. This is why I’m asking you not to do this”. In this instance, ELM theory (Petty et al., 1983) concludes higher audience involvement with these controversial discussion topics. This finding is in line with the work of Reinard (1988) and Chavan (2009), amongst others, who suggest that enhanced informational appeals are most appropriate where there is a high degree of uncertainty or risk associated with the required behavioural change, or if there exists a general unwillingness to discuss the subject matter.

5 Conclusions

This study set out to examine the role of CE in SM campaigns in India. Specifically, the study assesses the Indian expatriate understanding of CE and SM, the effect celebrity source characteristics have on message acceptance, the most influential celebrities and most relevant causes in India, and the scope celebrities have to elicit socially responsible behaviour.

This paper makes several contributions. First, the unique framework provides the opportunity to investigate an under-researched theme, SM, from an under-explored perspective, behavioural change, in a further under-examined context, the Indian expatriate psyche. It serves to highlight the value and importance of CE as an enabler of social progress in an Indian environment, and in so doing, contributes to the creation of a fairer, more just and by implication, a more sustainable society.

Second, the study highlights deep understanding of, and familiarity with the CE process, but ambiguity between the concepts of SM and social media. Furthermore, the core deliverable of SM is perceived as short-term message acceptance rather than long-term behavioural change.

Third, in contributing to our understanding particular to CESM, the very characteristic perceived as most critical in influencing the purchase decision, source attractiveness, can in fact hinder the acceptance of a social message. Further, not only does appearing in multiple and varying CESM campaigns not overshadow the communicated message, but rather, amplifies audience respect for the celebrity: the ‘reverse vampire effect’. In extending our understanding of endorsements from brands to SM, source characteristics of hypocrisy, dishonesty, incongruence and negative publicity
all have undesirable impacts on the campaign message. Similarly, the findings suggest that a perceived link between the celebrity and cause remains critical to campaign success.

Fourth, Amitabh Bachchan, Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni are seen as the three most influential celebrities in India, and education, corruption, poverty and the caste system are seen as most critical to India’s social progress.

Fifth, the value celebrities add to SM campaigns is clearly understood by the Indian expatriate audience, as facilitators of both awareness for the cause, and influence over the audience. Furthermore, in citing examples of Amitabh Bachchan and Pulse Polio, Aishwarya Rai and eye donations, and most significantly, Aamir Khan and Satyamev Jayate, respondents believe that not only does the entertainment industry have a captive audience to communicate with, but also that its celebrities have the obligation to do so responsibly. To that extent, celebrities have been identified as effective, innovative and essential drivers of social development in India. The study provides further insight into perceived effective messaging styles, concluding that women and children-related causes are more successful if presented with an emotional appeal, and that informational messaging is crucial to riskier, taboo discussion points.

Nevertheless, significant obstacles to campaign success remain, and responsibility for behavioural change is beyond the remit of only CESM. In this regard, participants highlight several concerns, including unanticipated sustainability costs of using a celebrity, incongruence of source and message, and in a departure from the extant literature, politics and corruption, which are of particular concern in an Indian context. Indeed, rampant corruption coupled with a deeply traditional and divisive mindset, a lack of education, and extreme poverty on a fundamental level, are regarded as India’s key obstacles in the development of a sustainable society.

6 Implications, limitations and further research

6.1 Implications

The theoretical implications of this study are manifold: First, while the exact source characteristics impacting message acceptance may differ between brand endorsement (attractiveness) and SM endorsement (credibility), the very characteristic critical to brand endorsement (attractiveness) may in fact hinder SM effectiveness. However, characteristics of dishonesty, incongruence and negative image damage both brand and SM endorsements, alike. Second, the findings reinforce the congruity principle highlighted by the participants’ need for a link between celebrity and cause. Thus, the study finds that the source models may be extended from brand to SM endorsements. Third, whereas social attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is a critical element of brand endorsement, the reverse appears to be true for SM endorsements, determined by increased respect levels for celebrities who endorse several campaigns. Fourth, though the ‘vampire effect’ [Erdogan, (1999), p.296] is a credible threat to the success of brand endorsements, this study reveals a ‘reverse vampire effect’, demonstrated by participant recall of cause over celebrity. Fifth, there appears to be ambiguity around the long-term goal of SM, perceived as message acceptance, rather than behavioural change. Sixth, the study emphasises the importance of communication style on message acceptance, established by the categorisation of causes into two types: those requiring an emotional
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appeal, relating to women and children, and those best served by an informational appeal, relating to controversial discussion areas. Thus, this exploratory study adds several new perspectives to CE and SM literature.

The managerial implications of this study are too, significant. CESM must be set up to succeed. Most critically, social marketers must address the uncertainty around the ultimate goal of SM, perceived as short-term message acceptance, rather than long term behavioural change. This can potentially be remedied at the call-to-action level of a message. Second, this study concludes that CE in an Indian SM context is uniquely placed to drive sustainable development, specifically, due to increased message awareness and increased influence over the audience. Third, when producing a SM campaign, the celebrity of choice must have a sound reputation, be perceived as credible and be linked with the cause in some way. Amitabh Bachchan, Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni are perceived to be the most influential celebrities in India, and education, poverty, corruption and the caste system are considered most critical to India’s social progress. Given that endorsing multiple social campaigns only serves to amplify respect for the celebrity, it would appear that three aforementioned celebrities are a logical starting point in the selection process.

Similarly, celebrities themselves may be interested in this study’s findings. First, perhaps due to the altruistic nature of SM, audiences are less critical of celebrity involvement in driving message acceptance and behavioural change. Advocating on behalf of a more sustainable society is viewed as respectable, and presents an innovative and responsible opportunity for celebrities to engage with their audiences. Second, celebrities must cultivate their reputation, as this forms part of their brand equity, and potentially transfers to the entities they associate with, whether brand or cause. Third, the study provides a comprehensive, albeit non-exhaustive list of concerns, perceived as critical for socially inclined celebrities to advocate on behalf of.

6.2 Limitations and further research agenda

This study followed a primarily qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, albeit coupled with some quantitative elements, such as rankings. Rigorous quantitative research may potentially provide statistically relevant findings, through which the conclusions in this study may be validated. Additionally, the research is limited to a convenient sample from Dubai, UAE, with participants known to one of the authors, and while every effort was made to ensure confidentiality and maintain objectivity, responses may have been influenced by this relationship. Furthermore, this investigation interprets campaign success as changed behaviour, an objective just as hard to measure, as it is to achieve. The findings provide direction for future research.

Further investigation into the ‘reverse vampire effect’, will contribute to our understanding of CESM. Similarly, exploring the notion that social attribution theory (Heider, 1958) does not apply to SM, can lead to a more sophisticated understanding of this communication strategy. Studying the impact of celebrity attractiveness on SM campaigns may allow for a more exact definition of the source models in this area of marketing. Equally, as the investigation of meaning movement from social message to celebrity is wholly unchartered territory within SM, its study can potentially modify McCracken’s (1989) meaning transfer model, representing a two-way exchange, reflected in Figure 1.
Further examination of the impact of informational and emotional communication styles could enhance our understanding of SM, thereby facilitating its success, as its objective moves beyond message acceptance, to long-term changed behaviour. Finally, an interesting area for further research can be found in addressing the impact of celebrity demographics, i.e., endorser gender, age, nationality and area of expertise, on message acceptance and behavioural change.

**Figure 1** The potential bidirectional meaning transfer model (see online version for colours)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Endorsement</th>
<th>Consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objects, Person, Context</td>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role 1</td>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Stage 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Path of meaning movement (uni-directional)
Path of meaning movement (bi-directional)
Stage of meaning movement

Source: Adapted from McCracken (1989)

**References**


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