

ROLE OF CELEBRITIES IN THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Celebrities are significant force in India and could be leveraged for promotion of sustainable agriculture. The current research aims to develop a theoretical framework which how promotion and adoption of sustainable agriculture can be impacted by celebrities. The proposed theoretical framework comprises of three variables namely, celebrity credibility (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness), communication mechanisms (media campaigns via TV, documentaries, movies and social media) and behavioural output (intentions of adoption of sustainable practices). Government, businesses and non-government organisations can also adopt the model to develop effective social and sustainable campaigns.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, Sustainable agriculture, India.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation has been provided and suffered by agriculture. Traditional farming methods have contributed immensely to soil erosion, scarcity of water resources and enhanced emissions of greenhouse gases (Pretty, 2008). Sustainable agriculture intends to address these issues by promotion of environment friendly, financially viable and socially responsible farming techniques. However, the extensive acceptance of such techniques remains restricted, particularly in developing nations like India.

Academic research has shown that one of the major hindrances in adoption of such methods are inefficient communication and lack of public engagement (Rogers, 2003). Conventional extension services and policy driven methods have failed to attain attention of large audiences. In this regard, celebrities have become potent communication agents as they have achieved as they have achieved widespread public recognition and trust. Celebrities can influence consumer attitudes, behaviour and social norms through their visibility in media and popular culture (McCracken, 1989).

The current research aims to develop a theoretical framework which how promotion and adoption of sustainable agriculture can be impacted by celebrities. By assimilating academic literature and conceptual framework, the research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How can a celebrity impact promotion and adoption of sustainable agriculture?
2. What are the various factors impacting the effectiveness of celebrity involvement?
3. How can future government policies and campaigns be impacted by a well defined model?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture has been defined as a farming method which maintains productivity while protecting natural environmental resources and supporting communal equity. It comprises of various methods such as organic farming, integrated pest management, conservation tillage, agro forestry, and efficient water use. Existing studies have shown that sustainable agriculture enhances health of soil, decreases environmental impact and increases long term profitability (Pretty, 2008). Despite its benefits, adoption of such practices is influenced by awareness, perceived benefits, financial incentives and social norms.

Celebrity Endorsement and Social Influence

Celebrities are extensively used in marketing activities by companies, governments, non profit and other organisations due to their inherent ability to attract consumer attention and impact consumer attitudes and behaviour in a positive manner (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Social influence theory states that individuals tend to emulate actions endorsed by well liked and respected public figures. Celebrities act as a opinion leader who can speed up the process of diffusion of information and legitimize new ideas. Previous research has shown that number of factors such as attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness impact effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in India. When consumer perceive match between a celebrity and the endorsed campaign, the impact of persuasion increases.

Wright (2016) conduct a study for replicating the work of Till and Busler (2000) using two experiments. The experiments are carried out using one fictitious male sport star and one fictitious male movie star and the products included pen, cologne, candy bars and energy bars. Two experiments are carried out using dimensions of celebrity expertise and attractiveness. The results of study illustrate that in case of both the experiments, the match-up between the celebrity association (expertise/attractiveness) and product lead to favourable brand attitude.

McCormick (2016) examine the impact of congruency between an unfamiliar celebrity endorser and the product in forming millennial consumer's attitude towards advertisement, brand and generating purchase intentions. Data are gathered from a total of 300 students comprising of 282 females (94%) and 18 males (6%). The results of one way ANOVA reveal that the match between an unfamiliar celebrity and the brand generates positive attitude towards advertisement and brand but does not influence purchase intention of millennial consumers.

Patel and Basil (2017) conducted a study to examine the impact of match-up between the celebrity attractiveness and the endorsed products. The study is carried out using two male sport star, one male TV star, one male singer and one female movie star, two female TV star, one female sport star, one female singer and one male chef. The products chosen for the study comprised of underwear, jeans, and cologne, perfume, shower speaker, cold drink and vitamin water. The results depicted that celebrity attractiveness has impact for all types of products however; it gets heightened when endorsing beauty related products.

Min et al. (2019) examine the impact of celebrity-brand congruence on attitude toward celebrity, attitude toward brand and consumer buying intentions. The theoretical foundation of the study is laid down by applying Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory and the Balance theory. An experimental research design is framed for the study to collect data from 105 female millennial consumers. The study is conducted using a female movie star as a

celebrity and shoes and vacuum are selected as the products for the study. The results of the survey show that celebrity-brand congruence influences attitude toward celebrity, attitude toward brand and consumer buying intentions.

Celebrities and Sustainability Campaigns

Academic research has shown that celebrities have been frequently involved in promotion of social causes such as public health safety, climate change, soil and wildlife conservation. It has led to increased campaign awareness, enhanced coverage by media and rally support of general public. On the other side, these campaigns have been criticised on the basis of lack of authenticity or oversimplification of such diverse and complex problems.

Academic research has shown that there has been little research pertaining to celebrity involvement in the context of sustainable agriculture. Previous research has mainly focussed on issues such as consumer behaviour related to organic food and eco-labels and thereby, leaving a huge research gap in determining and understanding the role of celebrities in impacting farmers, village communities and policy formulation and implementation.

Existing research has shown that celebrity endorsement has been a powerful tool in shaping consumer perception in both business and societal domains. They are considered to be individuals with high level of public recognition and they use it for promotion of goods and services and thereby, impacting consumer purchase intentions. They have been used to enhance brand recognition, recall and boost loyalty by using variables of celebrity credibility, familiarity and liking. Celebrities act as cultural mediators which can shape social norms and environment conscious actions of the consumers (Jackson, 2008).. Trust and message relevance impacts the impact of Influencer and celebrity credibility positively on sustainable consumption behaviour

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The current research proposed models is based on three key theoretical outlooks:

Source Credibility Theory

It states that effectiveness and efficiency of a message delivered by a celebrity depends upon three key variables namely, expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Celebrities who are considered to be genuinely dedicated and familiar with sustainability campaigns are more likely to impact consumer attitude and actions pertaining to sustainable agriculture.

Social Learning Theory

It posits that individuals learn the behaviour by imitating, especially their role models (Bandura, 1977). Celebrities are considered to role models in India and their actions are likely to inspire individuals to adopt such sustainable behaviour activities and support environment friendly farming initiatives.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

It describes that how consumer attitudes, subjective norms and behavioural control impact behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Celebrity endorsements are more likely to have a positive impact on consumer attitude towards sustainable agriculture practices, reinforce public norms, and augment supposed feasibility of sustainable actions.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The proposed theoretical framework comprises of three variables namely, celebrity credibility (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness), communication mechanisms (media campaigns via TV, documentaries, movies and social media) and behavioural output (intentions of adoption of sustainable practices).

Model Explanation

The theoretical model suggest that celebrity credibility is likely to directly impact effectiveness of communication by enhancing consumer awareness and trust and thereby, impacting behavioural outcomes such as intention to adopt sustainable farming practices

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current research comprises of theoretical and practical implications which are as follows:

Theoretical Implications

The present study adds to literature of sustainability and marketing communication by integrating celebrity endorsement and sustainable farming practices research. The current research proposes a well defined model which can be adopted for future quantitative research.

Practical Implications

Government, businesses and non-government organisations can also adopt the model to develop effective social and sustainable campaigns. The major factor for success of such campaigns lies in the selection of credible and authentic celebrities whose values match with agricultural beliefs and thus, positively impacting consumer trust and campaign effectiveness (Erdogan, 1999).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The proposed model is theoretical in nature and requires to be empirically tested. Culture may impact effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. Additionally, there could be a huge risk of celebrities diluting the message awareness. Future empirical research must try to look into these issues and attempt to determine the long term impact of such celebrity endorsed messages.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable agriculture practices are need of the hour. They are required to address food security challenges, global climate change and wildlife concerns. Celebrities are significant force in India and could be leveraged for promotion of sustainable agriculture. The current research proposes a theoretical model which explains how celebrities can impact consumer behaviour in the context of sustainable agriculture. Governments, NGO and business can strategically use these initiatives to fasten their achievement of sustainable development goals.

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