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## **A study on the communication strategy of celebrity endorsement in Surrogate Advertising**

**Abstract :** This paper seeks to explore the tactics of surrogate advertising with a special emphasis on how celebrity endorsement is being used in marketing products whose direct marketing is legally prohibited. The study will begin with an analysis of the communication tactics of surrogate advertising and will pinpoint the persuasion tactics, figurative metaphors, and brand-link association patterns needed to capture consumer interests and keep them hooked. It then goes into celebrity endorsements and how they help build the credibility, desirability and recall rates of surrogate brands and competency between celebrity image and brand positioning is also analyzed. In the end, the paper analyses some of the legal complaints and regulatory measures on celebrity-endorsed surrogate advertising to help evaluate the implications of brand strategy and ethical marketing. The results of this study are expected to give a full picture of how surrogate advertising works as a creative and legally sensitive tool in marketing, and provides information to those in the world of advertisement, policymakers, and pressure groups.

**Keywords :** surrogate advertising, prohibited product, celebrity endorsements.

**Introduction :** The Concept of Surrogate advertising as defined by Merriam-Webster's, is a "substitute". Surrogacy is often associated only with surrogate mothering, which is a case whereby a woman is artificially inseminated with the father's sperm. She holds the baby in her womb and hands it over to the couple whose womb it belongs to, to parent. The surrogate mother is the biological mother of the baby. That is because it is her ovum that was fertilized with the sperm of the father. So, is the case with surrogate advertising aims to sustain the brand name of those products whose commercials are not allowed to be broadcasted (Singh & Pallavi, 2018). Surrogate advertising is a marketing technique that applies to promoting goods that have prohibited direct advertisement through laws and regulations e.g., alcohol, tobacco and gambling. In this practice, one promotes an alternative product, which can be rather likely to be closely related or a brand extension product such as soda, water, music CDs or events among others and in the process gives a slight but indirect promotion to the main brand image. Surrogate advertising is very common in the countries where certain type of goods is highly regulated and yet the brand name and consumer interaction are to be maintained without infringing the regulation on advertising. Advertising standards council of India (ASCI) identifies the following definition of surrogate advertising which states that: Surrogate advertising is any commercial communication indicative of the use of a proscribed commodity, or of its brand name, without describing the commodity.

In India also, the same kind of development took nearly the same form. Hence, the Cable T V Regulation Act banned liquor and Cigarette Advertisements in the year 1995. In this case the brand owner had to resort to seeking other options. One of them is the releasing of Bacardi Blast music CD. In any case, a number of liquor corporations started financing and initiating glamorous objects. There are some others who started selling T-Shirts, Drinking Glasses, Caps, Key chains...etc and the brand names were printed on these products (Suryawanshi, 2011). Currently tobacco and liquor advertisements have been prohibited the air in India on both TV and radio. Only tobacco adverts with the statutory warning of smoking being harmful to health have been allowed to be displayed by the print media. This brought the booster to surrogate advertising of alcohol and other tobacco related commodities. The main aim of owners of the brand is to ensure that their brand names do not die in the minds of the consumers. This became an alternative advertising of a liquor brand. Another twist to the matter was that the Central Government made a decision to prohibit tobacco companies to sponsor sports and cultural events. The same case occurred when it came to liquor products.

Surrogate advertising originated as a reaction to growing prohibition on advertising products which were deemed to be harmful to health of the population, like tobacco,

alcohol and gambling. To start with, history has witnessed the British women go to the floor to protest against commercialization of the prohibited products like Alcohol and Tobacco products. This is because British companies began to manufacture the proxy products like Soda and fruit juice using the same brand name. In India, brand industries too are fast catching up with the surrogate advertising as an appealing marketing model. One can trace its roots to the mid-20 th century when such nations as the United States and the United Kingdom began to prohibit direct advertising of smoking and alcohol on the television and the radio. In order to have brand recognition, firms introduced substitute or proxy products that bore the same brand name and identity aka t-shirts, perfumes, soda or music records.

Even in India surrogate advertising picked up a lot of steam following the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995, which banned advertisement concerning tobacco and alcohol on cable TV. This was also supported by the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, that prohibited any direct advertisement of the tobacco products. In order to adjust, firms started selling non-tobacco products with the same brand. One example is that the cigarette brands began to advertise music CDs, awards or even clothing lines with their brand names and logos.

Eventually, surrogate advertising became a common marketing strategy in India where numerous companies another loophole and utilize overlapping unrelated products such as, insubstantial drowning advertisements, and jangling CD's. Businesses discover loopholes and do not hesitate to exploit them by utilizing wholly unrelated products to advertise their primary offerings (Tyagi & Tyagi, 2023). Hence, primary objective of this study is not only to explore the communication strategy but also aims to analyze the Celebrity endorsements of such products and whether the general public considers them ethical.

**Literature review :** Surrogate advertising is playing a major role in creating awareness of young adult citizens of India and perceptions and a majority of the respondents have shown a good level of awareness towards indirect methods of advertising. The research also indicates that identification of surrogate advertisement does not scare the young adults to keep a negative image of the brands, but on the contrary, it gives an aura of sophistication and exclusivity (Riwaria & Shah, 2024). Celebrity influence in the case of surrogate advertising has a very high impact. A large percentage of the population thinks that advertisements encourage them to consume more. It has been found that the awareness of surrogate advertising is a gender-based phenomenon. Also the opinions of respondents concerning surrogate ads change perception towards purchasing the product, is age dependent. That suggests it is a specific age group instead of all age cohorts (Rout et

al., 2021). This psychological engagement, otherwise referred to, “the halo effect,” is crucial to shaping public perception. Advertisers connect a surrogate product with desired qualities. They create a psychological linkage between a surrogate product and the original. Positive grapefruits elicited with surrogate advertisement are usually coupled with the original even if the surrogate advertisement is well known to a consumer. The advertiser need not directly advocate the original product. The halo effect is that the product is indirectly advocated, the attraction, appeal, and image to the product is even more enhanced (Pomal & Bharti, 2024).

**Theoretical framework :** The ELM, or **Elaboration Likelihood Model**, was created by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo in 1980, and is a persuasive theory that analyzes attitude changes and how people receive and process messages. The model shows how persuasive messages are processed via two different routes, central (logical) and peripheral (emotional/visual.) In ELM, persuasion is achieved through misleading or surrogate ads that depend heavily on the peripheral route and use celebrity faces, emotional manipulation, a catchy slogan, cunning and catchy ads, and emotional appeal to get consumers to buy the product without any real rational evaluation on the product in question.

In the work of McCombs and Shaw, **Agenda-Setting Theory**, describes how the media focuses the attention of the public in a particular direction by giving more ‘airtime’ to specify the brand or Product. Used in the context of surrogate advertising, this suggests that the constant advertising of alternative products such as cardamom, soda, or music shows keeps the ‘restricted’ brands like Kamla Pasand, Vimal, or Royal Stag in public discussions over the time. Surrogate ads leave out the harmful products, yet the brand name and imagery is always on the audience’s mental agenda. Surrogate ads work like magic in shaping recall and visibility of brands whose advertising is not permissible, allowing the public to form or alter perceptions of these brands.

**Methodology and Justification of Study :** This study has employed Content analysis on Digital surrogate advertising of three randomly selected advertisements of popular brands Royal Stag, Vimal, and Kamla Pasand during the period from 2010–2014. For this, a coding sheet will assess the appeal strategies, symbols, and celebrity endorsements, as well as the slogans and taglines. This period is selected because of the migration of surrogate advertisements from television to the internet, taking advantage of the weak regulations. These three brands are chosen for the reach and the backlash they got from the public for the deceptive advertising. Because of celebrity endorsements, advertisements received increased attention, making them important cases to observe the tension between the creativity of advertising and the ethics of regulation.

**Objectives :**

1. To investigate the communication strategy utilized by the surrogates' advertising appeals.
2. To explore the strategy of celebrity endorsement in surrogate advertising to increase sales.
3. To explore the Ethical and Legal regulations against surrogate advertising.

**Findings and Discussion****Advertisement 1- Vimal Elaichi**

Celebrity-centric campaign

Narrative- reflecting friendship and stress-free environment

Appeal-aspirational

Visual cues- colorful and musical

Interpretation – three friends enjoying the moment

Impact- widely circulated and youth connected with the catchy tagline and friendship but some people criticized it for surrogate advertising for Tobacco brand promotion. ASCI and COTPA have also examined that criticism and controversy. Vimal advertisement influences the youth by blurring and catchy tagline- “Bolo Juban Kesari” and creating confusion between actual product (Cardmon) and the depictive product (Gutka/Tobacco). After backlash Akashy Kumar dropped out of that campaign and apologized publicly. The CCC deliberated that on the advertisement, the advertiser is promoting the brand name denoted by the advert of Vimal Elaichi and has oblique hints or clues a tobacco product - Vimal Gutkha. The advertisement which shows the Vimal Elaichi product is a surrogate advertisement to promote a tobacco product (Vimal Gutkha). The CCC also reasoned on the issue that the advertiser failed to append substantiating data to prove that the product being advertised should be considered a brand extension product. No evidence was given either in the form of a license or a CA-verified certificate of turnover of the net sales to demonstrate that the product of the advertiser is a true brand extension. In the CCC noted that the advertiser failed to supply any evidence to demonstrate that the celebrities have exercised due diligence before agreeing to endorse the product and to make sure that all the descriptions, claims and comparisons as made in the advertisement can be substantiated.

**Advertisement -2 Royal Stag**

Celebrity-centric campaign

Narrative- emphasizing the fearless energy and power to win

Appeal-aspirational and emotional

Visual cues- back & White tone, dynamic gestures

Interpretation – represents working hard and dying with willing power

Impact- following largely, connect the youth with emotional values and dynamic, energetic performing. People admired the tagline, “Make it Large,” positively. Some Anti-Liquor NGOs and Public health activists criticized for not mentioning the actual product (Music CDs) and using an emotional narrative to recall the parent brand (Whisky) by celebrity endorsement. ASCI and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued a warning to the advertiser to stream carefully and add disclaimers. The tag line used in an advertisement with Ranveer Singh, which is, “It my Life, Make it Large” is an idea that echoes in the mind-set of a person who subscribes to the truth that: the accumulation of small victories along the way to life leads to big victories ultimately. According to the Advertiser, the text of the advert does not bear any hooves or words that depict marketing of any alcoholic so as to break any law, however, by any means imaginable. The CCC watched the OTT advertisement and reviewed the data on support of claims. The CCC made due diligence regarding all the submissions they received and discovered that the advertising material content was without the least connection with music CD. The music CD was not circulating even at the Shop. Nonetheless, it was after evaluation of the documents available that the CCC came up with a decision that the Advertiser has failed to sufficiently assert that it is indeed a true line extension product.

### **Advertisement -3 Kamala Pasand**

Celebrity-centric campaign

Narrative- Dedicating a new generation, a new mindset, and chillness

Appeal- Humor and joy

Visual Cues- colorful, music, and dance

Interpretation – the new generation has their own new style, but they also love to have Kamala Pasand for linking legacy, proud Indian taste.

Impact- shared widely, loving to see the former two Indian cricketers together in the same frame. Showing patriotism. But endorsing Tobacco-linked products, Suneel Gawaskar and Veerendra Sehawaag have faced the storm and public criticism. Cricket Fans reacted- Why are cricket legends promoting Cancer in a box?. Health Related Information Dissemination amongst Youth (HRIDAY) and Tobacco Free India Campaigners, complaints against Yuvrag and Gavashkar to endorse the harmful, deceptive product. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has also issued a penalty and apology for such a cricket celebrity endorsement.

**Content Analysis by Code Sheet**

| S N | Brand Name    | Surrogate clues        | Core Product      | Tagline            | Celebrity endorsement                     | Tone                | Appeal strategy                      | Regulatory Action                                   | Remark   |
|-----|---------------|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1   | Royal Stag    | Music CDs              | Whisky            | Make It Large      | Ranveer Singh                             | Emotional & Sorrow  | Aspirational & Emotional             | ASCI issued a warning                               | Widely influenced the youth with the tagline- Make it large      |
| 2   | Vimal         | Cardamom               | Panmasala/ Gutka  | Bolo Zubaan Kesari | Shahrukh Khan, Ajay Devgan & Akshya Kumar | Celebrity Prestige  | Royal and celebrating friendship     | ASCI & COTPA have examined, but no legal compliance | Criticized heavily after Akshay Kumar apologized publicly.       |
| 3   | Kamala Pasand | Silver Coated Cardamom | Paanmasala /Gutka | Anokha Swad        | Suneel Gawashkar & Virendra Sehvag        | Humor and Happiness | Patriotism and celebrity Credibility | CCPA issued penalty and apology                     | Highly criticized by anti-Tobacco NGOs and demanding an apology. |

**Conclusion :** The majority of such advertisements are artistically done to be enjoyed sightseeing. Advertisements create a rosy image and enlighten effectively, which makes them aggravate the need of goods and services among individuals. Preliminary analysis shows that, surrogate advertising has been based on the use of indirect though highly emotive communication messages to keep the brand visible and, at the same time avoid active direct advertising prohibitions. These campaigns are considerably enhanced with the inclusion of celebrity endorsements as they allow to harness the credibility, popularity and what is sometimes the aspirational nature of a particular endorser which can often be applied into to the stronger consumer interaction and eventual sales growth. Nevertheless, such a strategy has also resulted in tightening of legal issues, as regulatory organizations question the ethicality and legitimacy of the given actions, especially the ones that cause the impression on misleading or indirectly advertising restricted products. The work supports the idea that advertisers must be careful to integrate creativity and branding efforts on one side and legal concepts on the other, and endorsers must demonstrate the conscious efforts in their association with products to protect consumer interests and guard their own reputations. It lies in the hands of the government to make up their minds

and either ban these ads completely or to illustrate these ads under self-regulation and warnings as in case they are to be given regular ads, that is the question of the future, but the decision to take to stop the surrogate ads has to be taken now.

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