

**A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL
TESTIMONIALS AS AN APPEAL IN TELEVISION
COMMERCIALS OF HEALTH-CARE PRODUCTS**

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Abstract

Consumers are bombarded daily with many health claims in their busy life. To even buy or chose a health-care product, they ask for some authentication to the product. Hence, Television commercials these days has endorsements with health specialist or an actor to state that their particular product is not harmful and clinically tested hundred percent. When few known health specialist endorse the product on screen, the buyers chose the product for their everyday life. Many of the commercials appearing in the regional channels also fall under this category. This study involves content analysis of commercials that had testimonials from doctors or health specialists of health-care product. A survey among Chennai people to study the effectiveness of health related testimonials as an appeal.

Keywords

Lay Endorser, Health-care products, Testimonials, Medical Claims, Indian Medical Association (IMA)

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1. Introduction

1.1 Beginning of Medical Testimonials

Even in the 90's doctors were used to endorse tobacco products especially cigarettes. The people of Europe started to buy it thinking it has no harm. The advertisements appeared in famous magazines, posters, doorsteps etc.

In India, before Independence hair oils such as Keshranjan oil had endorsers as doctors and ayurvedic practioner. They write some testimonials about the product and give out more credibility to the product. They also had testimonials from general public saying that the product is good and gives more growth.

Limitations of the study

Though there are many medical endorsers used for the commercials , the analysis on a regional level only is possible. The content and the popularity can be discussed within the context of only this specified domain. Though there has been a rise in regional level, most of the commercials that had more medical claims are from other language productions. So , it was impossible to get the dubbed commercials in a small span of time. Only the current telecasted commercials were able to be analysed.

2. Objectives

- To study the trust level of the product when given medical authenticity and the influence of it.
- To find out which category of product has more of this medical testimonials
- To study the content and demonstrations of this health-care product commercials.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence the consumers to buy a product?
2. Is professional testimonials in commercials of health-care products trusted?
3. Which product category has more number of professional testimonials in their commercials?

4. Review of literature

4.1. Professional testimonials and its styles

As explained by Gerard J. Tellis in his book Effective advertising , Endorser can be of three different categories in advertisements

1. **Celebrities** : Celebrities are the ones who appear in any commercial for the sake of public identity and to enhance their star value

2. **Experts** : Experts are the individuals or organisation who target people perceiving specialized information on any problem physically or environmentally. They are physicians who appear in commercials or any advisory organisation or corporate who give more information on public welfare and with special regards to health

3. **Lay Endorsers** : Lay Endorsers are the ones who act like an expert on screen but they would be perfected models used as spokesperson in an advertisement.

(Chang, 2007) stated from his study that the message or the content in health care advertising penetrates the audience to buy the product that results in change of product buying behaviour

Advertising is a genre that dilutes the self-consciousness with authentication of the communication that has an underlying goal and profit (Leiss et al. 2005 ; Gilmore and Pine 2007 ; Lewis and Bridger 2001)

Indian commercials with evidences

On a comparison of advertisements of Kesharanjan oil and Kuntaleen oil, 1905, Arun Chaudri concluded that endorsements are an important feature and treated as a more prominent factor to decide the purchasing power of any consumer (Chaudhuri, 2007)

5. Methodology

The research is to find the Effect of professional testimonials shown in Health-care product advertisements. The researcher attempted both Qualitative and Quantitative methods to interpret the aim of the study. To analyse and interpret the objectives of the research , the attained research methodologies are

- **Survey method** : A method of distributing questionnaires to a set of target group and analyzing their answers is called a survey method. Multiple choice questions were given to the samples in Chennai. About 225 samples attempted this methodology. The targets chosen for the study were women as it was required for the study. Women of age from 16-50 attempted the survey from different parts of Chennai like Choolaimedu, Thiruvanmiyur, Adyar and Perungudi. 75 respondents from online survey and 150 respondents from direct survey attempted the study.

- Content Analysis** : Earl Babbie defines it as "the study of recorded human communications, such as books, web sites, paintings and laws". The doctors featured advertisements were studied from channels of Sun TV, Star Vijay, Jaya TV were taken up for the study. Randomly doctor endorsed products were recorded from these channels from April 2013 till May 2013 was studied on the various aspects of content like Number of Health-care products which had such endorsements with doctors, Major products which use such strategy to advertise their product, Professionals interaction, body language and vocal tone, Different representations of doctors or professionals in the advertisements.

6. Findings

6.1. Buying a health-care product

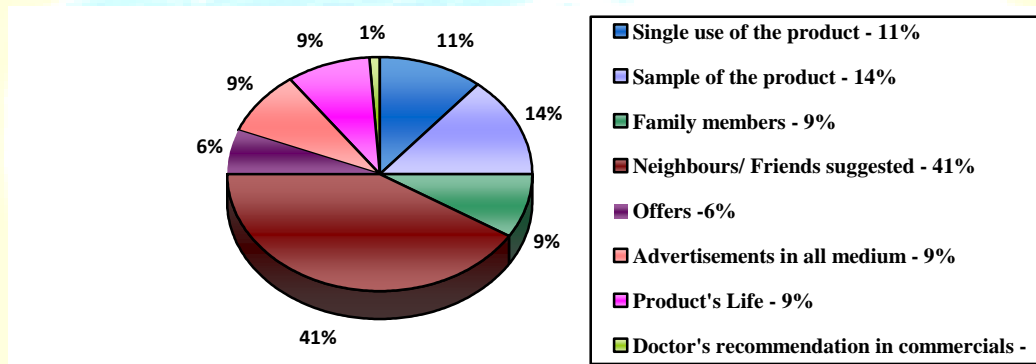


Figure 1. Buying a Health-care product

About one percent of the respondents have said that they buy a product with doctor's testimonial in the commercials. Otherwise majority of the targets however said that they will prefer to buy a Health-care product because their friends or neighbours suggested it. Few house wives also said that they would prefer a product just because their family members use it. About eleven percent said that they decide to buy a product regularly after the single use of the product.

6.2. Trust Level

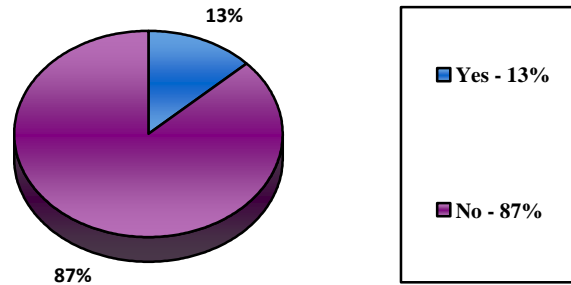


Figure 2. Authenticity and Trust

Most of the women respondents says that the claims that the doctor's make aren't trustworthy. When asked for reason for its non-trustworthiness ,the respondents said the following

- The medical claims made by them aren't true and it cannot be proved also.
- The brand didn't satisfy their needs after buying it watching these professional advice on the particular product.
- The authenticity of the doctor cannot be proved and they all can be actors.
- It builds a false trust by this strategy and most of the viewers know it
- It might be also partially true
- They aren't trustworthy but yet buy the product for some other reason
- The advertisers do it for marketing and money.

But, Just a few people also said that its trustworthy because it is endorsed by a medical person.

6.3. Product Categories and their Content

Table. 1. Presence of Health and Medical claims

PRODUCT	HEALTH AND MEDICAL CLAIMS	USE OF CREATIVE VISUALISATION FOR DEMONSTRATION	DURATION
Oral - B (Toothbrush)	Keeps the teeth healthy, World's no.1 toothbrush	nil	20 secs

	brand		
Colgate total pro-gum health (Toothpaste)	Solution to gum problems in 4 weeks, No.1 toothpaste recommended by doctors	✓	20 secs
Johnson & Johnson baby (soap)	Clinically proven for mildness recommended by doctors even for their infants	nil	30 secs
Dettol Kitchen Gel	100X protection from germs	✓	34 secs
Boro Plus powder	Solution to 5 skin problems and prickly heat	✓	20 secs
V-Care Shikkakai paste	Free from Paraben and sulphate that causes cancer and hair fall	nil	19 secs
Cinthol (soap)	Solution to 3 skin problems	✓	19 secs
Pepsodent pro-sensitive (Toothpaste)	Prevents from enamel erosion and pain due to sensitivity	✓	30 secs
Sensodyne (Toothpaste)	Gives relief from sensitivity	✓	19 secs
Dabur red (Toothpaste)	Relieves pain and cavity	✓	39 secs
Lifebuoy hand sanitizer	99.99 % germs is killed	✓	30 secs
Domex (toilet cleaner)	All germs killed	✓	20 secs

All the commercials have some medical or health claims, especially the brand Colgate and Dettol has more amount of Health claims and medical claims like statements like Number one recommended brand by doctors.

Out of 12 commercials 8 commercials had creative visualisation to explain and demonstrate the product and its use. Rest had direct statements and voice over of demonstrations. Most of the toothpaste and soap commercials had creative visualisation tags at the bottom of the screen.

7. Conclusions

Professional testimonials are now springing up everywhere especially while bringing up health products. Doctors and medical associations have started endorsing beauty care products, food products, however the majority would be health-care products. The presence of professional testimonials relating to health-care issues is no more successful and as said by majority of the respondents it has no impact on them to buy the product.

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