
Decoding Celebrity Life cycle with special emphasis to Bollywood Stars: A Case analysis on Shahrukh Khan

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Abstract

An effort has been made to formulate a celebrity life cycle model, decoding the various phases a celebrity can typically go through in his career. This paper serves the marketers, agencies and advertisers to have a close look wrt which phase the celebrity is falling in if in case the celebrity is used for brand endorsements. A celebrity life cycle that has been explained in this paper is a typical model and can be applied to any form of celebrity be it a movie star, sports or businessman. Here the special emphasis is given on Bollywood stars with a case analysis of Shahrukh Khan. Analyzing his filmography from the data retrieved from IMDB and analyzing the number of box office hits, super hits, blockbusters and flops he has given and analyzing which stage he is currently in and how did he reach here.

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1. Introduction

Celebrity endorsement has gained significant popularity in the last 3 decades. If strategically used it can be one of the powerful tools in marketing communication and promoting brands, products and services. The reason for Celebrity endorsements to gain popularity is that it creates positive impact on consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions for the endorsed good as well as its influence on consumers' purchase behavior, brand awareness and brand recognition. Further, it makes products and brands more attractive and appealing to potential customers; many consumers are thus willing to purchase and pay a premium price for the products their favorite celebrities endorse. Similarly, nowadays celebrities are gaining influence among consumers, given the increase in their presence in social media, and evidence shows that recommendations by celebrities on social networking platforms are increasingly important to change consumers' behavior.

Product Lifecycle:

The Product Life Cycle (PLC) theory proposes that like living creatures, all products also have a life cycle (Altunel 2017). The term 'lifecycle' generally denotes the full set of independent stages

to be passed, followed, or performed by a product, from cradle to grave (Dutta, Garetti, and Kiritsis 2010; Kiritsis, Bufardi, and Xirouchakis 2003), with each stage requiring different approaches to its production, distribution, and marketing (Bartlett and Twineham 2003). All products go through a life cycle encompassing introduction, growth, maturity, and decline (Agbadudu and Ogunrin 2006; Berkowitz et al. 2005). As noted by Langerak, Hultik, and Robben (2004), the introduction stage is where the product is introduced to customers, while the growth stage starts with a demand trend for the product; determined mainly by customer acceptance. Acceleration of demand is then shaped by market, competitors, economic conditions, and sociocultural factors. At the maturity stage, the product reaches a wide target customer group and at the same time, competition is higher than in the previous stages (Gmelin and Seuring 2014). Finally, in the decline stage the product begins to lose consumer appeal and sales drift downward (Assael 1990). The PLC framework has been commonly adopted to study various subjects (Taylor and Taylor 2012), and in some instances, supplementary life cycle situations emerge due to new social, political, economic or technological developments that require an evaluation of current practices (Nadeau, Pailhès, and Sebastian 2005).

As noted by Rose et al. (2007), today's knowledge-intensive product development environment requires new frameworks for understanding product life cycles, given that life cycle models heavily depend on the product type which then impacts the enterprise business processes (Kiritsis et al. 2003). Global competition, increasing customer expectations, and technological innovations tend to accelerate product life-cycles (Hines, Francis, and Found 2006); an important factor in sport settings (Gordon and Lavalley 2012). For example, the growth stage of the English Premier League has rapidly increased globally due to the increased popularity and availability to view the product on multiple media outlets. In this changing environment, traditional lifecycle management methods may be ineffective (Basallo-Triana, Rodríguez-Sarasty, and Benitez-Restrepo 2017), requiring innovative strategies to manage each stage of the products lifetime. Terzi et al. (2007) suggested that the management of the product lifecycle is becoming mandatory for management given that products have changed into an artifact; a complex result of tangible and intangible components. Because of its critical impact on marketing strategy, the PLC has become a central, enduring framework in marketing (Golder and Tellis 2004), and has been extensively utilized in a wide variety of industries and settings (Rink and Swan 1979). In terms of a celebrity life cycle, it was suggested that it resembles the standard product life cycle (Fox et al. 2012), but there are circumstances that may negatively affect a celebrity's lifecycle appeal (e.g., declining abilities or poor performance) (Hamlin et al. 2006). This is one reason as to why product management teams must contend with competitors by adding new features to differentiate themselves from others within the market. If newly added features and expectations of the customer group overlap, then the growth curve can increase and the product can survive (Altunel 2017). In that context, brand reinvention often represents a key strategy to extend product life cycle (Wood, Dennis, and Franzak 2008).

In case of human brands, branding varies according to the field of celebrity (Lunardo, Gergaud, and Livat 2015), and celebrity brands are often viewed as more complex and intense due to their constant exposure, reputation and image (Ilicic, Baxter, and Kulczynski 2016).

In this context, research on celebrity endorsement has traditionally focused on the source characteristics of the endorser and on the transfer of meanings between the endorser and the recommended product or brand. However there is a dearth of research conducted on the life cycle of a celebrity. Like every product and brand which has a lifecycle of its own. A celebrity as well typically goes through a lifecycle with its own stages. The purpose of this paper is to explore the various stages of celebrity lifecycle.

2. Research Objective

To study the various stages a celebrity goes through in his/her career

3. Research Design

In order to develop a sound research design the nature of research that has been taken to consideration is exploratory in order to explore the various stages a celebrity can go through. Bollywood celebrity; Shahrukh Khan is taken as a case study approach; where his film career in form of filmography is explored using IMDB webportal platform which has been a secondary external source of data. A list of 71 odd movies have been analyzed and have been segmented into Boxoffice performance: Hit, Super Hit, Blockbuster, Flop throughout his career from 1992 to 2020. An analysis of his television series has also been conducted for period from 1988 to 1990 before he ventured into the Indian film industry.

4. Conceptual Model: Celebrity Lifecycle

An attempt has been made to develop a conceptual model of celebrity lifecycle. A typical celebrity life cycle can take the following stages:

1. Struggling period & Tipping Point
2. Growth stage
3. Maturity stage
4. Decline stage

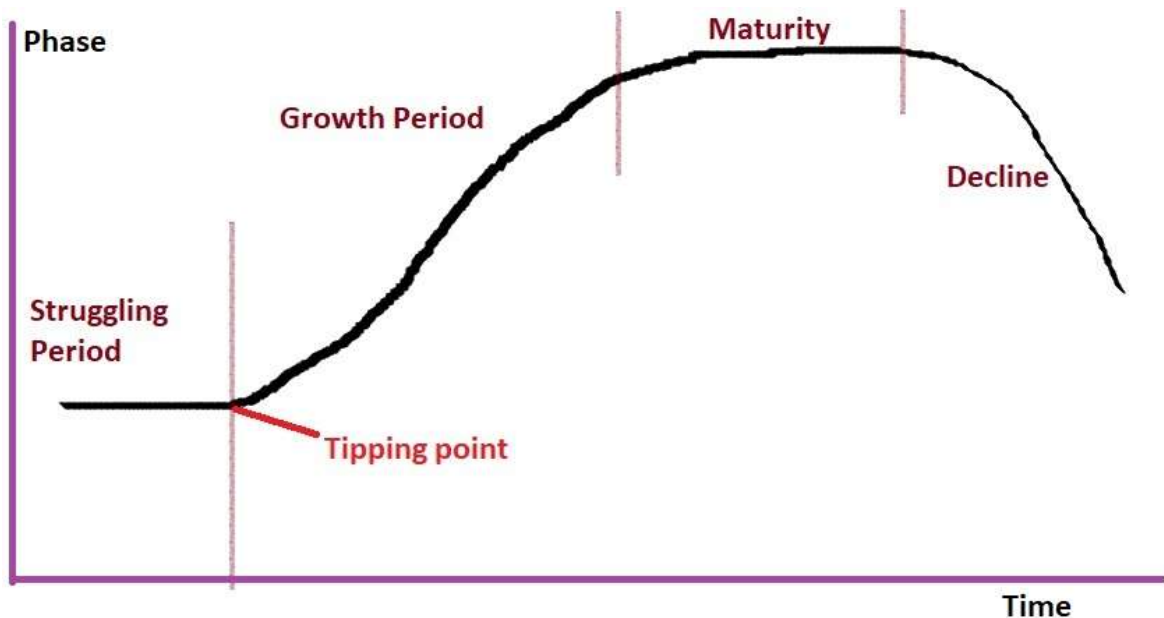


Fig 1: A Typical Celebrity Lifecycle

A celebrity life cycle can ideally take 4 stages: i. Struggling Period ii. Growth period iii. Maturity

iv. Decline. To elaborate on the lifecycle, a case of a well known Indian Movie star -Bollywood celebrity is taken into consideration. 'Shahrukh Khan' who is also addressed by his fans as the King of Bollywood, he has been ruling this industry since mid 1990s and currently is in the maturity stage due to his age factor. He is one of the most non-controversial name in the Indian film industry.

Let us now look at the Celebrity Lifecycle for the Super star – Shahrukh Khan:

Struggling Period & Tipping Point:

Celebrity Phase: Struggler pre- Tipping Point, Becomes a Star - Post Tipping Point

This is a period where the actor is struggling for a break. He is struggling for a one big hit that would make him an overnight success. India being such a populous country with so many people struggling to show their talents and get a break, it is not easy at all unless you have a Godfather in the Industry or you come from a fraternity of movie stars i.e. you come from a family of movie stars/directors/producers; the the struggling period is nearly zero; they get a one big break where they have to be the best eg: The Kapoors, Deols, Bachchans etc..

For someone like Shahrukh Khan (SRK) there has been no background whatsoever and he had to struggle and prove himself to be a star and get his first break. So for someone like him, the struggling period can go as long as 5-10 years before they get a break and are truly noticed and liked by the audience. Which can be technically called as a '**Tipping Point**'. This point is also applicable to the prodigies of celebrities provided they are an instant hit at the time of the 'launch' eg: Hrithik Roshan in his debut movie: Kaho Na Pyaar Hein.

During the struggling period, Shahrukh Khan started with television series- Fauji and Circus which became a big hit among the television audience in the late 80s. But still it took him few years to get his 'Tipping Point' for his first big hit: Baazigar & Darr in 1993, not to mention the number of flops he gave before achieving his Tipping point.

The Tipping point in SRK's life made him a '**STAR**'. A 'Star' was born. He became the heart throb among the million of Indians.

Growth Stage:

Celebrity turns out to be a Star to Super Star from back to back Box Office Hits and to Larger than Life Image with a good no. of Box Office Blockbusters.

Once the Tipping point is crossed, the celebrity enters into the growth stage. This is a very cautious phase, where in there is a high chance, that if there are back to back flops, a celebrity can land up in decline stage. Hence the celebrity is choosy with regards to selecting the right production house, a good character role and a good script. Also throughout this phase he has to take care he does not come into negative publicity which may ruin his career and bend the growth curve to decline.

One should confess, that SRK gave multiple flops in the growth stage but also gave hits and super hits throughout the stage to keep him going up with movies like Karan Arjun. But for a star to be a '**Super Star**' he requires a 'Block Buster' and that came in his life in 1995 with Yash Raj Production's 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' (popularly known as DDLJ). That made him a Super star, and thus there was no looking back. Throughout his journey he gave plenty of flops, hits and superhits but his Block Bluster movies kept him reaching higher peaks. In the entire growth phase he gave 7 off Blockbusters which is incredible in a life a movie star. To name a fe of his Block buster movies: Kuch Kuch Hota Hein, Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gam, Chak De India, Chennai Express.

The moment a celebrity is a 'super-star' there is a surge in the number of product endorsements he gets from the advertisers as all advertisers look forward to seize the opportunity of a 'super star'

With series of Block busters the celebrity finally graduates to the highest level of his growth and that is "Larger than Life image" where he or she is worshiped like a demi-god.

There is an astronomical growth in the products endorsed by the celebrity the moment he becomes a Larger than Life image star from a super star. There have been very few celebrities who have got the fortune of being Larger than life image. To name a few we have the Superstar from South India: Rajnikant, Amitabh Bachchan and Salman Khan from Bollywood.

Maturity stage:

This is a phase where in he starts getting more of a character role because of his age factor. However because of his immense popularity and larger than life image- there is absolutely no dearth of endorsements. The celebrity reaps the benefits of his past success and laurels and reaches a stage where whatever they touch turns gold.

One should not be under impression that a celebrity reaches maturity due to his downfall. He reaches that stage as mentioned before largely due to his age factor. At this stage as well like all the other stages the celebrity has to be very cautious about his image and should take care that his image at no point on the life cycle is tarnished, which would eventually lead to his downfall resulting in decline stage.

Decline stage:

This a stage that occurs in the life of a celebrity either naturally which is largely due to age factor, where in the rate at which the decline happens is eventually slow or it happens rapidly whenever a celebrity at the beginning of his career gives back to back hit and ends being a one time hit or a fly by night operator kind of celebrity. Another reason for an early decline stage can be the celebrity being in controversy which may ruin his career. In such a scenario for the celebrity to rise up and comeback he has to give a superhit or blockbuster performance in the box office or a strong positive PR activity to rectify his diminishing social image.

5. Conclusion

The Celebrity Lifecycle (CLC) thus can come out as a powerful mechanism for understanding the current status of the celebrity which will help the marketer/advertiser/agency to evaluate the risk proposition of using a celebrity for endorsing the product or brand depending on which stage he is in. A marketer can make a shift in his communication strategy when a celebrity transits from one phase to the other. Hence CLC acts like a tracker in understanding when to approach a particular celebrity thus protecting the image of the brand or product which is endorsed.

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