LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY OF SPORTS CELEBRITIES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract
This Study aims at understanding the sports celebrities' familiarity among college students in Tirunelveli city, Tamil Nadu. The researcher has selected top 20 highest earning sports celebrities in India (Forbes India, 2013). Companies have been investing huge money on celebrity endorsement for developing brand equity. The researcher conducted a simple survey with the question in mind, whether the celebrity endorsement is worthy or not. With this motive, the researcher started examining the familiarity of sports celebrity as well as their brand endorsed product recalling ability among college students. For this purpose researcher collected data from 92 respondents and used four background variables such as gender, their domicile, the students' engagement in a sports activity and their favorite game. The percentage of familiarity of each sports celebrity is found out in this study. The impact of background variables on the level of sports celebrity familiarity among college students have been derived by ANOVA. Cluster Analysis was used to group the celebrities on the basis of familiarity and their endorsed product recall ability among college students. The researcher arrived at some major findings i.e., background variables have got impact on sports celebrity identification or familiarity level. This study concludes that urban male sports persons are more aware about the brand endorsers. Hence the researcher is of the opinion that promotions using more number of widely recognized and widely accepted cricket sports personalities will help in increasing the brand identification among the youngsters.

Key Words: Sports Celebrity, Celebrity Endorsement and Brand Recall.

INTRODUCTION
A celebrity endorser is "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken, 1989, p. 310)[1]. This definition explicitly encompasses celebrities, who appear to have expertise or a long-term association with the manufacturer, but it excludes typical customer endorsements featuring non celebrities. Smart and attractive marketing is a key for successful business in today's heavy competitive environment. Promotional strategies involving celebrities from film industry and sports world provide superfluous benefits compared to other unknown endorsers. Celebrities can cut through the advertising clutter and can hold viewer attention says, Charbonneau & Garland (2005)[2]. Celebrities can easily transfer their positive qualities such as physical attractiveness and likeability to the brand they promote says, Ohanian (1990). It is because celebrities appear to be gaining and increasing influence in society (Choi and Berger, 2010)[3]. Communication, including marketing communication that employs celebrity endorsers, can be characterized as a process in which the sender conveys stimuli to influence the behavior of others (Hovland *et al.*, 1953)[4]. Lasswell's (1948)[5] classical framework of persuasive communication differentiates the elements of the communication process according to his well-known formula: "who says what in which channel to whom." The first element, "who", refers to the message source or sender (Ajzen, 1992; Hovland *et al.*, 1953)[6].

Therefore, use of appropriate celebrity endorsers can bring over a great turnover for the promoted product and its organization. However, incorrect celebrity endorsement or inappropriate use of wrong personalities may lead to a controversy

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[1] *McCracken, G. (1989): Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. Journal of Consumer Research, 16(3), 310-321.*

[2] *The use of celebrity athletes as endorsers: views of the New Zealand general public" by Charbonneau, Jan;   Garland, Ron, International Journal of sports marketing & sponsorship, Volume:7, Issue:4, July 2006*

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[5] *Lasswell, H.D. (1948): The structure and function of communication. In: Bryson, L. (ed.), The Communication of Ideas. New York, NY: Harper and Row, pp. 37-51.*

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and creation of negative perceptions about the brand. Selection of familiar, well known, positive image portraying celebrities plays a crucial role. This paper aims at identifying the college students' level of familiarity, and the factors influencing the level of familiarity and the brand identification.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Marketing in today's business world has sufficient history of using sports celebrities as endorsers for promotional campaigns. As the investments in this type of professional sports endorsements increased significantly, the need for research in the area has also become vital. Youngsters being attracted by the social media most, the impact of these types of advertisements among the college students have to be investigated. The familiarity of these personalities among the students community is also a query. Hence, this study aims at analyzing the familiarity, level of awareness and its impact on brand identification by the college students in Tirunelveli city.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To identify the level of familiarity about the sports celebrities among the college students
2. To study the influence of independent factors (Gender, Area of living, Sports Participation and Favorite sports person) on the level of familiarity
3. To study the influence of independent factors (Gender, Area of living, Sports Participation and Favorite sports person) on sports person identification.
4. To classify the sports celebrities into groups on the basis of the level of familiarity among the college students

METHODOLOGY
The study is a descriptive research which involves probability sampling technique. The sample is selected through simple random sampling method and the data is collected through questionnaire. The researcher has analyzed the familiarity of the 20 sports celebrities in this paper from 92 respondents. Statistical tools – percentage, ANOVA and Cluster Analysis are used to obtain results for the objectives of the study.

Photographs of the top 20 sports celebrities were shown to the students and they were required to fill in the questionnaire. It contained questions on their gender, area of living, whether they are involved in playing any sports are not and whether they were able to recall the celebrity or not and finally the brand and characteristics associated with them.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS
The familiarity corresponding to each sports person among the respondents is shown Table: 1.

TABLE 1: FAMILIARITY OF SPORTS CELEBRITY- PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS
n = 92

S.NO	SPORTS CELEBRITIES NAME	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIARITY *
1	M.S Dhoni	90	97.8
2	Sachin Tendulkar	90	97.8
3	Virat Kohli	80	87.0
4	V Sehwag	56	60.9
5	G Gambhir	45	48.9
6	Yuvaraj Singh	66	71.7
7	Saina Nehwal	39	42.4
8	Milkha Singh	0	0.0
9	Rohit Sharma	32	34.8
10	Viswanathan Anand	69	75.0
11	S Raina	57	62.0
12	Rahul Dravid	55	59.8
13	Harbhajan Singh	67	72.8

14	Zaheer Khan	33	35.9
15	Sania Mirza	62	67.4
16	Leander Paes	17	18.5
17	Mahesh Bhupati	7	7.6
18	Mary Kom	10	10.9
19	Vijendrer Singh	4	4.3
20	Gagan Narang	2	2.2

Percentage exceeds 100, due to multiplicity of responses.

From the above table, it is evident that M. S. Dhoni and Sachin Tendulkar were the most familiar celebrities since 97.8 percent of the respondents have identified them. The second top familiar star is Virat Kohli with 87.8 percent, followed by Viswanathan Anand, Harbhajan Singh and Yuvaraj Singh with more than 70 percent response rate. Above 60 percent of the respondents identified Sania Mirza , S Raina and V Sehwag, The other 10 sports celebrities were having below 60 percent familiarity, whereas none of the respondents who belong to this young generation was able to recognize Olympian Milkha Singh, even after a feature film was released recently based on his life.

In the following table (Table: 2), the researcher has identified the influence of independent factors such as Gender (Male/Female), Area of living (Rural/Urban), Sports Participation of the respondents (sports person/ non sports person) and Favorite sports of the respondents on the level of familiarity corresponding to each sports endorser given in the questionnaire. Here the researcher classified the respondents' level of familiarity into low, average and high with the help of the formula MEAN $\pm$ S.D. The Mean value is 10 and S.D is 4. The respondents who were able to identify less than six sports celebrities (MEAN – S.D) were classified as respondents having Low awareness, those who scored is between 6 and 14, were classified as average and who were able to identify more than 14 (MEAN + S.D), were said to be in High awareness category. The table shows the classification of the respondents using the aforesaid procedure.

TABLE 2: THE IMPACT OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON THE LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY

PARTICULARS			LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY			Total
			LOW	AVERAGE	HIGH	
Gender	Male	Count	2	20	30	52
		% within gender	3.8%	38.5%	57.7%	100.0%
	Female	Count	6	24	10	40
		% within gender	15.0%	60.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Area of Living	Rural	Count	6	23	17	46
		% within area of living	13.0%	50.0%	37.0%	100.0%
	Urban	Count	2	21	23	46
		% within area of living	4.3%	45.7%	50.0%	100.0%
Sports Person	Sports Person	Count	2	25	28	55
		% within sports person	3.6%	45.5%	50.9%	100.0%
	Non sports Person	Count	6	19	12	37
		% within sports person	16.2%	51.4%	32.4%	100.0%
Favorite Game	Cricket	Count	2	12	21	35
		% within fav. game	5.7%	34.3%	60.0%	100.0%
	Others	Count	6	32	19	57
		% within fav. game	10.5%	56.1%	33.3%	100.0%

The respondents are classified into three groups based on the level of familiarity about the celebrities, viz., the respondents with high level familiarity, those with average or medium level familiarity and those with low level familiarity. It is clear from the above table that, out of 52 male respondents, 2 have low familiarity, 20 have average familiarity and 30 have high level of familiarity. Similarly, out of 40 female respondents, 6 have low familiarity, 24 have average and 10 have high familiarity. Comparatively, male respondents have high familiarity (57.7%) than female.

Likewise, urban respondents have higher familiarity (50%) than rural respondents (37%). On the basis of sports participation, it can be acknowledged that the respondents who are sports persons (50.9%) were able to identify the sports celebrities easily than others. As far as the Cricket loving respondents, they were having high awareness about the sports endorsers than other respondents (60%).

The researcher aimed at testing the relationship between the respondents' gender, area of living, their sports activities and their favorite game and their awareness level score on sports celebrity identification, to reconfirm the above analysis by framing a hypothesis and ANOVA was used for this purpose.

NULL HYPOTHESIS
H_0 - There is no mean significant difference between respondent's gender, area of their living, their sports activities and their game favoritism and their knowledge score on sports celebrity identification.

TABLE - 3 THE IMPACT OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON THE SPORTS CELEBRITY IDENTIFICATION-ANOVA

Particulars	Groups	Mean	Sum of squares Mean square		Calculated 'F' value	Remarks at 5% level
GENDER	Male	10.73	98.098	98.098	5.449	**Significant**
	Female	8.08	1620.370	18.004		
AREA OF LIVING	Rural	8.54	98.098	98.098	5.449	**Significant**
	Urban	10.61	1620.370	18.004		
SPORTS PERSON	Sports person	10.40	92.835	92.835	5.140	**Significant**
	Non sports person	8.35	1625.632	18.063		
FAVORITE GAME	Cricket	10.97	109.987	109.987	6.154	**Significant**
	Non cricket	8.72	1608.480	17.872		

(At 5% level of significance, for (1, 90) df the table value of 'F' is 3.946)

The above table states that the null hypothesis is rejected since the calculated 'F' values (5.449, 5.449, 5.140 and 6.154) are greater than the tabulated value (3.946). Hence, there is significant difference between the groups with respect to their awareness level score on sports celebrity identification. Male respondents have additional knowledge than female respondents (mean value: 10.73>8.08). Urban respondents have scored more comparing to rural respondents (mean value: 10.61>8.54) stating that urban people are more aware about the personalities than rural. Sports persons are having a higher knowledge about the celebrities (mean value: 10.40), than non-sports persons (mean value: 8.35). Respondents with cricket as favorite game (mean value: 10.97) have high familiarity than other respondents (mean value: 8.72).

FIGURE: 1 CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Dendrogram using Average Linkage (Between Groups)
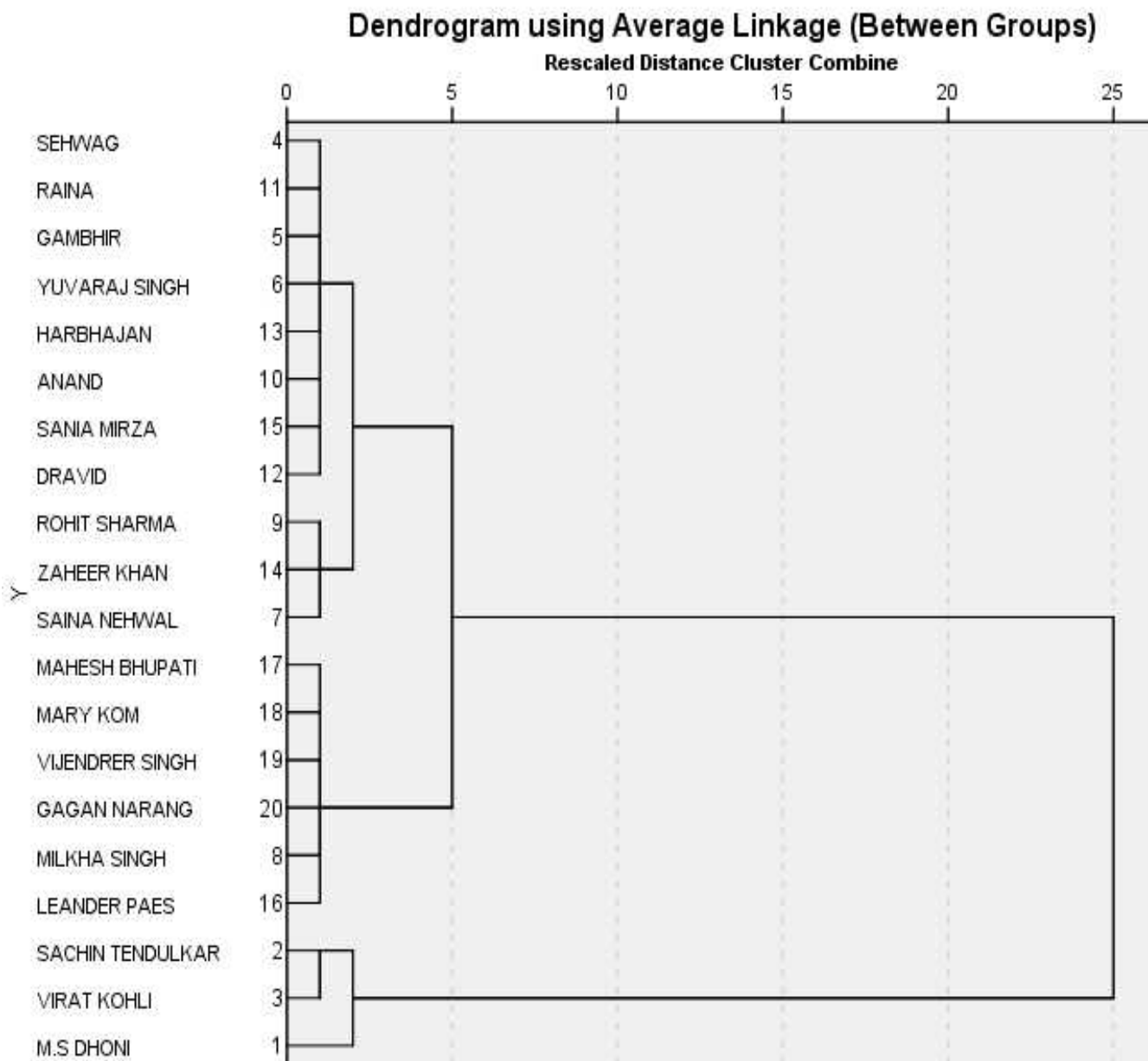
The Cluster analysis is used in grouping the celebrities on the basis of familiarity and their brand identification by the respondents. The above figure shows the four levels of classification, based on which the researcher has obtained the following results.

    Cluster: 1   Very high familiar celebrity - M. S. Dhoni, Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli
    Cluster: 2   High familiar celebrities - Sehwag, Raina, Gambhir, Yuvaraj Singh, Harbajan Singh, Anand, Sania Mirza, and Dravid.
    Cluster: 3   Moderate familiar celebrities - Rohit Sharma, Zaheer Khan and Saina Nehwal
    Cluster: 4   Low familiar celebrities - Mahesh Bhupathi, Mary Kom, Vijender Singh, Gangan Narang, Leander Paes and Milka Singh

CONCLUSION
The study concludes that cricket players have got very high fame and acknowledgment than other sports players. Especially, M. S. Dhoni, Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli occupy the top place for recognition. Since urban male sports persons are

more aware about the sports endorsers, promotions through more number of widely recognized and widely accepted cricket sports personalities will help in increasing the brand identification among the youngsters. Further, to induce a higher level of impact and acceptance of sports celebrities among the female, the female sports celebrities can be involved to promote female interested products such as apparels, cosmetics, cooking and home utensils, health products and such other products.

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