

Capturing Trends and Identifying the Emerging Cool: A Study of Indian Bollywood Celebs on Twitter

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People actively participating on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and blogs are questioning the age old logic of boundaries and space. Virtual networks like twitter have given space which not only explores individual self but also connects to a mass phenomenon emerging through thought leaders, celebrities or 'trend setters'. This study is an attempt to take the argument further and identify the emerging 'trend' in India through the celeb-tweets. To verify the argument empirically tweets of ten celebrities on twitter from Bollywood which include actors, choreographers, musicians, and producers were collected over a period of one month and tweet analysis was done by adopting hermeneutics as the method of data analysis. Appropriate codes were considered to address the major question of the paper on 'social trends' and the notion of 'being cool' to validate the question raised in the paper.

Keywords: Trend, cool, Twitter, celebrity, Bollywood, new media, space

"Change" has always been identified as a mediated manifestation. Every change is accompanied by a form of media and social media as a new addition transformed not only the way of life but also the boundaries of interactions. A survey said that seventy per cent of young people believe that social media is a force for change in the society (Kumar, 2013). Social networking sites such as: Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, blogs, online forums and communities, recommendations, ratings and reviews help online users to interact, share information and experiences (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). The growth of Internet and mobile penetration in India paints a positive picture! In June 2013 India had 190 million Internet users and out of 190 million 130 belong to urban and 60 billion belong to rural India (Internet in India, 2013). As per the report of Comscore (The Hindu, 2013), India has bypassed Japan to become third largest Internet user after China and United States. As per the report of Statisticbrain, total number of facebook users worldwide is 1.4 billion, and the average amount of tweets per day is 190 million (Social Networking Statistics, 2014). Twitter is rated among the top three social networking sites and is truly growing as a micro-blogging site. Speed is the major difference between blogs and microblogs. According to scholars, ordinary blogs are perceived as a tool for logical statements, knowledge sharing and discourse. Micro blogs, on the other hand are mostly used to write about users thoughts and quick reflections (M. Ebner, 2008).

The concept of "Cool" emerged in twentieth century. It is a peculiarly an American phenomenon, and more particularly an Afro-American phenomenon. The word "Cool" was used first in vernacular named "Birth of Cool" by Miles Davis (Brekenfeld, 2009). "Coolness" is a set of shared meanings (e.g. language, self presentation, artistic expression, values, attitudes) within friends group which signify group affiliation (Kathleen A. O'Donnell, 2000). These days, association with social networking means "Coolness". It has become a new norm for celebrities to show off

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their “coolness” in front of their fans through Twitter. Hargittai & Litt (2011) have noted that Users can follow one another’s content without reciprocal obligation and it has significant implications when one of the users is a celebrity. Previous research has shown that Twitter accounts with the largest number of followers are celebrity accounts. Celebrities are renowned persons who always receive major media attention (McCracken, 1989). For example - Ashton Kutcher and Oprah Winfrey, or politicians like Al Gore has the highest number of fan followers (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). In India, actors and actresses get most following. Legendary Indian Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan is on the top with 7.4 Million fan followers (Mittar & Bhat, 2013).

This paper tries to identify the emerging trends of Celeb Tweets. Appropriate codes will be considered to address the major question of the paper on ‘social trends’ and the notion of ‘being cool’ to validate the question raised in the paper.

Literature Review

Social media landscape

India is the third largest Internet population of 205 million as of 2013, and is projected to have 75 per cent growth with 330 to 370 million Internet populations by 2015 (IAMA Report, 2013). A report states that 86 per cent of the Indian web users visit social networking sites and spend an average of two hours daily on social networking sites (Singh, 2013). A research report (Bhinde, Sharma, et. al. 2013) revealed that the mobile users are growing at 91 per cent compound annual growth rate from 2012 to 2016; 86 million of these mobile users have Internet connections on their smart phones and thus, access to social networking sites. As social media grows, it goes beyond the technological landscape and becomes a socio cultural phenomenon which cuts across national boundaries and cultural groups of people with similar kind of interests (Louie & Venkatesh, 2013). A survey said that 70 per cent of young people believe that social media is a force for change in the society (Kumar, 2013). Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith (2010) gave very practical meaning of social media that “it’s a set of online tools that supports social interaction between users.” According to Cramer (2013) rapidly growing adoption and acceptance of digital technology and digital media covers multiple viewing screens and platforms. People can participate freely on social media (Louie & Venkatesh, 2013). They have started participating actively on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and blogs are questioning the age old logic of boundaries and spaces. Moreover, social networking is the technology that has “put a personality to the face” (Jackson, N. D). Many are relying more on recommendations from friends and followers on their Twitter and Facebook news feeds.

The Notion of ‘Cool’

A study by Lam, Ahearne, et. al. (2010) says “identification with a brand weaves the brand identity into the fabrics of self-identity, and it is not easy for customers to change their associations with a brand identity”. Thus brands spend significant money and energies on building identities that will be accepted and appreciated by their target audiences. So how does a brand become a “cool” brand? Research found that for the designing of any technology, innovation is a leading factor attributed to coolness among the teenagers (11-15 years of age group). Folk concepts of cool (Shriver, 2003, Pountain and Robins, 2000) are not easy to measure because it is real, constantly changing construct and requires psychological measurement. Coolness can be a personality trait, distributed property network or just a word distinctively defined by each individual using it (Gerber & Geiman, 2012).

“Cool” might be defined as having cool things, doing cool stuff and being of cool. Study done by (Horton, Read, et. al., 2012) targeting teenagers stated that cool is actually about having

cool things. According to Warren and Campbell (N.D.) if brands are able to differentiate themselves from the mainstream norms in a positive way, then they are considered to be cool brands. Cool brands are neither considered as conformist nor excessively bizarre. Moreover, being 'cool' also depends on the counter-cultural values that consumers have. Belk (2006) wrote that "refers to a person who is admired because she, or more often he, exhibits a nonchalant control of emotions, a rebellious trickster demeanor, an ironic detachment from the regard of others, and a "cool" style of talking, walking, gesturing, and grooming". 'Cool Identity' is not related to any income, gender or religion, however, the 'cool identity' depicts uniqueness and vibrant which in turn affects the consumer's desire to be associated with a cool brand conscious product, it being the most dominant predictor (Rahman & Laud, 2011). Loureiro and Lopes (2011) identified ten characteristics of cool brands based on a review of the literature and interviews with consumers as: contemporary, remarkable experience, sub-group, emotional relation, preciousness, singularity, unconventional, social conscience, youthfulness, and vintage.

Celebrities as 'Cool' Brands on Twitter

Before a few years' celebrities were mere names for us. We knew about them through newspapers, magazines, and television. But the picture is different today as we can access news and enjoy presence of celebrities from various sources on mass media, digital media and social networking sites. Because of these new technological changes celebrities have an opportunity to gain fame, connect with fans and air their grievances (Knibbs, 2013). Patra & Datta (2010) defined celebrity as a person who is successful in his/her own profession, widely recognized in the society and have huge fan following and enjoy media attention with the demographic and psychographic connection with the target audience. The emerging online environment of Internet, smart phone represents 'attention economy' which means it gives you an opportunity to have your voice heard (Davenport & Beck, 2001).

In recent years cultural and media analyst studied much in the area of individual visibility, especially in relation to notion of fame and celebrity (Gamson 1994; Holbrook 2001; Carducci 2004). Thus it is seen that apart from endorsing brands, celebrities participate in promotional events, appear on different television shows, be a part of social networking (like Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to make themselves visible and do personal branding. Popular celebrities have started using Twitter for personal branding and gaining a wider access with their audiences. The media is filled with constant updates on celebrities and their blogs to tell us where they go, what they do (Devaney, 2007). It has become an effective platform where celebrities can connect to their fans and can share their view points and on the other side users can gain continual access to celebrity related gossips (Knibbs, 2013). Twitter is the most intimate form of media communication which gives sense of "being there" to the fans of celebrities (Stever & Lawson, 2013).

Celebrity use Twitter for sharing of personal moments, work promotion, interaction with fans, brand promotions, and opinion on current affairs. Uses of twitter gives an edge to celebrities for their personal branding through direct engagement with their followers and fans. This trend has not only grown with the alternative social media platforms but also the importance of digital engagement has led to a new celebrity-fan relationship (Nextbigwhat, 2009).

This paper borrows from the literature available on characteristics of a cool brand and analyses tweets of celebrities to understand as to how the celebrities are projecting themselves and building their own identities in India.

Method

This paper draws its arguments from different literatures ranging from societal notion of being

cool to branding ideas and approaches of being cool to explain 'how we understand the concept of being cool'. To understand the notion of cool, the paper draws a major framework with specific characteristics of 'being cool', essentially coming from existing literature discussed in literature review section. As highlighted in different literature there are five major ways how cool is being explained over a period of time like contemporary, emotional stability/philosophy, possession of cool things, glamour, rooted in tradition/culture and responsible for society/social cause. These five ways of expression of being cool is being used in this study as codes to analyze the behavior of selected celebrities in Twitter.

To find out the celebrity expression of 'being cool', in this study 10 most popular celebrities of India have been selected. These are the celebrities who essentially come from the Bollywood (Hindi movie industry) and/or actively associated with this industry having active Twitter accounts with huge number of followers. So for this purpose of study 10 Indian most popular Bollywood celebrities on Twitter have been selected and verified their Twitter account. The verification done on the basis of Twitter verified account symbol and in some cases the verification from Twitter India office has been done as well. The selected list of celebrities with their verified Twitter accounts are Amitabh Bachhan, Farah Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Hritik Roshan, Farhan Akhtar, Sonam Kapoor, Ronit Roy, Karan Johar, Shahrukh Khan, Azmi Shabana and the number of followers till May 2014 varies from 66 thousand of Sonam Kapoor to 9 million followers of Amitabh Bachhan. The tweets of these celebrities were observed and collected manually for 30 days from 15th March to 15th April 2014. All tweets of 10 celebrities were collected and divided as per the code mentioned above. There are total 566 numbers of tweets collected from the accounts and Sonam Kapoor had highest number of tweets in those 30 days which accounts for 166 tweets and followed by Amitabh Bachhan with 123 tweets. Tweets have been analyzed by adopting hermeneutics as the method of analysis. Most of the researcher's perceptual analyses of these tweets are being drawn from the previous works of defining 'being cool' and notion of cool in physical space. However, this paper explores the virtual manifestation of 'being cool' and how Indian celebrities associate themselves and connect with their fan followers and/or audience with the notion of 'being cool'.

Findings

Twitter celebrities from different spheres were first studied in order to develop an understanding on the content of their tweets. The study focuses on celebrities from the Indian film industry from various sub-sectors like theatre artists, film actors, singers, choreographers, producers, directors and so on. The popular culture of India mainly consists of cricket and films. These are celebrities in the country who enjoy 'God' like status and have a huge and loyal fan following. They have adopted to Twitter and see the medium as one which gives them freedom to express and interact with their fans directly. Moreover, fans see this as a first hand opportunity to interact with their heroes. The ten celebrities selected for the study were shortlisted based on the number of followers and their frequency of tweets in a week. This was done to arrive at a significant number of tweets for analysis. All tweets were recorded over a period of one month and a total of 566 tweets were collected and analyzed. The data includes only tweets and not retweets. The details of celebrities selected and their followers and tweets are given in Table 1. The tweets were analyzed based on six codes identified as parameters defining the notion of "cool". The codes were: Contemporary, Emotional Stability/Philosophy, Possession of Cool Things, Glamour, Rooted in Traditions, and Responsible for Society/Social Causes. All these codes were further understood and were defined to create a common understanding. The tweets were categorized and classified in these six codes.

Table 1. Celebrities and their followers

Name of the celebrity	Area of work	Twitter handle	Number of followers	Number of tweets during study
Amitabh Bachchan	Actor	@SrBachchan	9.3m	123
Farah Khan	Choreographer/ film-maker	@TheFarahKhan	1.4m	34
Farhan Akhtar	Actor/ Film-Maker	@FaroutAkhtar	3.2m	49
Hrithik Roshan	Actor	@iHrithik	5.9m	10
Karan Johar	Film-Maker	@KaranJohar	4.1m	36
Priyanka Chopra	Actor	@priyankachopra	6.4m	41
Ronit Roy	Actor	@RonitBoseRoy	72.4k	21
Shabana Azmi	Actor/Activist	@AzmiShabana	705k	44
Shahrukh Khan	Actor	@imsrk	8.2m	48
Sona Mahapatra	Singer	@sonamahapatra	61.8k	160

Total tweets recorded during the one month period show disproportionate number of tweets among the selected ten celebrities which is discussed in the analysis section. Post the collection of data, hermeneutics method was adopted for analysis of tweets as important texts to be understood in order to arrive at a conclusion of how tweets represent the cool quotient of celebrities as brands. Hermeneutics is a qualitative, non-intervening method of analysis of textual material used to understand the deeper meaning of the written word. Considering the subjective interpretation of the subject it is found that hermeneutics is the most suitable method for data analysis where 'explanation is a necessary step for understanding' (Patra, 2013).

Analysis

The categorization of total tweets as per the six codes identified for the study is shown in Table 2. The codes are defined for a common understanding and categorization. The definitions of the codes are explained below:

- (i) *Contemporary*: Tweets on current affairs, work, news and worldly issues. E.g. "In Singapore hosting of the IIFA awards"
- (ii) *Emotional Stability*: Tweets on emotional cool, emotions and philosophical matters which portray a balance between conformist and excessive bizarre. e.g. "Know your history. It will help you understand the present and perceive the future"
- (iii) *Possession of Cool Things*: Tweets on products, services, ideas which sound aspirational to non-members. e.g. "BA brings its latest aircraft Boeing 787 Dream liner to Hyderabad as a first dedicates plane with plaque carrying my name"
- (iv) *Glamour*: Tweets on objects, ideas, experiences that are Glamour for followers. e.g. "Off to the Cymroza #Art gallery for a show. Designer Vaishali S, Assamese weaves - SS 2014 #TodayImWearing"
- (v) *Rooted in Tradition/Culture*: Tweets on festivals, religion, family values example "Life is full of grey areas...so a celebration of color is more than welcome. Happy Holi."
- (vi) *Responsible for Social Causes/Society*: Tweets on social causes and concerns. e.g. "Earth Hour Today Between 8.30 – 9.30 PM. shall be voluntarily shutting off the lights in the house!"

Number of Followers

The popularity of people on Twitter is measured by the number of their followers. A person voluntarily follows someone and agrees to receive his/her tweets time to time. Celebrities have a huge fan following and so the number of followers they have is usually in thousands! Our data showed that

the celebrity with the highest number of followers (9.3 million) was none other than the God of Bollywood, Amitabh Bachchan. He was followed by Shahrukh Khan with a follower base of 8.2 million and Priyanka Chopra with 6.4 million followers was on the third position.

Total number of tweets

The most active person on Twitter in terms of number of tweets was the celebrity singer Sona Mahapatra. The person with the maximum follower base Bachchan was close second and Akhtar who is an actor and film maker was third as far as number of tweets were concerned. So one can infer that more number of followers do not mean higher amount of Twitter activity of the celeb as those with maximum number of followers did not tweet the most except Bachchan.

Table 2. Category of tweets

Issues Celebs	Contemporary	Emotional stability/philosophy	Possession of cool things	Glamour	Rooted in tradition/culture	Responsible for society/social cause
Amitabh Bachchan	48	42	5	5	9	14
Farahkhan	13	8	1	1	6	5
Priyanka Chopra	12	15	5	0	9	0
HritikRoshan	4	4	1	0	1	0
Farhan Akhtar	18	13	3	0	6	9
Sona Mahapatra	78	26	8	20	6	22
Ronit Roy	8	10	0	0	3	0
Karan Johar	22	10	0	0	3	1
Shahrukh Khan	5	30	5	0	7	1
Azmi Shabana	20	9	3	0	9	3

It can be observed from Table 2 as to which celebrities have tweeted on what subjects in the month period. Sona Mahapatra the celeb singer who has the maximum number of tweets, has tweeted the most on contemporary issues, possession of cool things, emotional stability and societal causes. Bachchan who stands second as far as number of tweets are concerned but is the celebrity with maximum number of followers has tweeted the most on contemporary issues, emotional stability and issues of societal concern. Overall, maximum tweets from the data are on contemporary issues followed by emotional stability/philosophy. Tweets on tradition/culture/family values are third in the ranking followed closely by tweets on responsibility towards society or issues of social concern. Interestingly not a single celebrity has tweeted equally on all subjects and thus question of identity versus image arises as far as using Twitter as a platform to extend their brand identity is concerned. Bachchan, Farah Khan and Sona Mahapatra are the only three celebs who have tweeted on all six themes.

“Cool” Quotient of Celebs

An analysis of tweets of Bachchan who has the highest number of fans/followers and tweets spread across all topics has the highest number of tweets which fall under the “contemporary” code. For example, he has tweeted on his film shoots, marketing activities pre-shoot, currents affairs, sports like cricket and football, future projects, trending films and television shows, film award functions, praise for success of others and so on. All in all a deeper analysis points out that in all his contemporary issue tweets he talks about his work, current affairs and success of others in a very positive way, creating an optimistic aura around his written text. Not a single tweet has abusive language or derogatory mentions. On the contrary, extremely polished manner of

representing his feelings and emotions and therefore comes across as a sorted human being and a celebrity who has lot of fame but is emotionally balanced. While some of his tweets are genuine words of praise for other's accomplishments at the same time he has also raised concerns for his own work and achievements through his tweet expressions. For example, tweets like *"Back from the launch of 'Kochadaiyan' Rajnikanth's motion capture technology film, made directed by his daughter Incredible!"* talks about how he appreciates others work and tweets like *"Press and promotion in Delhi. Tough! In today's time most essential. The results of this shall be known on the 11th of April"* talks about the human aspects of Mr. Bachchan. Such tweets put the concerned person in a position where the followers look up to him with respect and dignity. This would come naturally to a celebrity who has maximum number of followers because emotional stability indicates he knows the art of fine balancing between extremes. For example, "Making money cannot be the permanent business of humanity". Such tweets reassure the power of a cool brand in advising its followers to the right approach and attitude. However, looking at the number of tweets on social responsibility and areas of social concern the picture is a bit disappointing. The very fact that he is the most followed celeb on Twitter; he should have written the most on issues of concern for the society like rape penalty, same sex marriages, voting and so on. Though he has talked about gender equality and activities like fund raising where he is personally involved, the numbers of tweets as compared to his magnitude of reach are quite less.

The celeb with the second highest number of followers Shahrukh Khan surprisingly was on fourth position as far as number of tweets is concerned. He has maximum tweets in the area of philosophy and thereby comes across as a preachy brand as his tweets in other areas like contemporary, cool possessions, traditions, societal responsibility etc. are negligible. For example, one of his tweets says "It is exhausting to be on the job continuously, but in life those that continue, travel far. Those not, stagnate!" Analysis of the overall Twitter presence during our study period show that Shahrukh Khan has tweeted less and it may be due to some specific reasons like work stress and/or travel. However, some tweets in the direction of traditions and culture show a strong bond that he enjoys with his family especially his children. He comes across as a family guy and his identity is built around philosophical content and emotional bond with family.

The celebrity who has the highest number of tweets is the celeb singer Sona Mahapatra. Her top tweets are in the areas of contemporary, emotional stability and responsibility towards society respectively. She has also tweeted quite a few times about glamour and possession of cool things. She is well known as the well dressed, Glamour singer and therefore her tweets surely point out to the fact that her identity built over the years with her presence in mass media is getting extended to social media as well and therefore choice of content of tweets may be conscious or natural as per her personality. She has tweeted about designer labels, her involvement in reality shows, her stand towards societal issues like rape and violence and so on. For example one of her tweets says, "Its official. A brand new song & a brand new music video featuring ME from @PuraniJeansFilm releases tomorrow!" An in-depth analysis of her tweets portrays a picture of a person who is obsessed with her work/achievement/possessions. Here a difference between being proud of your achievement versus being obsessed needs to be understood. All her tweets have "ME" and "I" in capital which points to a person who is self-centered. But on the contrary, she has tweeted significantly on issues of societal concern which balances the self-obsessed persona with the concern for society.

Discussion and Conclusion

Analyzing the above data, it is clear that there is a direct connection between the established identity of a celebrity and what they wish to create as an identity on social media. There is a strong

link between what they write on Twitter and how they are perceived by their audiences of followers thus a classic case of identity leading to image. Also the popularity of the celebrity brings followers and therefore the number of tweets and followers do not have a relation. However, more active the celebrity on Twitter more is the overall involvement of followers. Thus, Sona Mahapatra who has tweeted the most out of the ten celebrities has less number of followers. A closer look reveals the fact that the content matter of the tweet too matters in attracting the followers and building a strong connect. One can also look at the fact that today in India most celebrities are advised by PR agencies on how should they come across on different media platforms. The same agencies also manage the media footprints and quality of coverage. Thus, celebrities who are perceived in a certain way due to mass media impressions come across exactly in the same fashion in our data analysis. To site an example, all across media touch points Bachchan comes across as an early adopter of technology and an excellent achiever. The same gets portrayed, as his tweets on contemporary issues and emotional stability are highest. Whereas media has always painted Shahrukh as the family man and his tweets too reflect that as he mostly talks about family and reuniting with his children post film shoot.

To conclude, this study found that celebrities use social media platforms like Twitter to extend their brand identity. The study clearly shows that in the making of a cool brand the strongest characteristics that a brand should possess are:

- (i) The brand should be contemporary and poised – the brand should be in touch with contemporary issues and latest developments in the market. Brand should be more than its own achievements and work and should be poised enough to recognize achievements and efforts of others.
- (ii) The brand should time and again show emotional stability – a brand becomes cool if it can show maturity and stability. Well respected brands are the ones that acknowledge errors and appreciate benefits. Cool brands also lead in a way by promoting philosophical learning.
- (iii) The brand should stand up for societal concerns – cool brands are the ones who lead in voicing their opinions towards issues of grave concern. At time they have to move out of their comfort zone and speak up.

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