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An Examination of Contemporary Celebrity Endorsement in Fashion

Abstract

This paper examines the contemporary relationship between fashion brands and celebrities. Noting the historic role of celebrities in fashion and their current prevalence in the industry, the paper moves beyond discussion of the motives and effectiveness of celebrity endorsement, and instead explores its nature and practice in the fashion sector. The paper proposes a new definition of celebrity endorsement in fashion, offers a classification of celebrities involved in fashion brand endorsement, and presents a typology examining the contemporary means by which a fashion brand may collaborate with celebrities. The typology is defined in context of the nature, length and cost to the brand of the relationship between it and the celebrity. The methodology uses secondary sources and qualitative primary research in an exploratory agenda in order to propose conclusions and suggest ideas for further research.

Key words: Celebrity Endorsement, Marketing, Media, Fashion, Branding

Introduction

As a highly marketing-orientated industry in which commercial success is often determined by immediate brand recognition and the dissemination of aspirational imagery and lifestyle affiliations in the media, the fashion sector is almost inevitably drawn to the high profile and perceived glamor of celebrities (Carroll 2009; Chiosa 2013; Hackley & Hackley 2015; Hung 2014). Indeed, since the emergence of fashion as a commercial enterprise, high-profile personalities have co-operated in the promotion of apparel garments, designers and brands: Parisian ladies of eminence were gifted gowns by Charles Frederick Worth, the resulting publicity contributing to his emergence as the first popularly-recognised 'fashion designer' during the late 1800s (Okonkwo 2007); Pringle (2004) notes the role of personalities as diverse as Jackie Kennedy-Onassis, Tupac Shakur and Liz Hurley in popularising fashion trends and brands throughout the 20th Century; and 'celebrity-branded' clothing, accessory and fragrance lines proliferate today (Keel & Natarajan 2012).

Notwithstanding the apparently significant role of celebrities in the commercial development of the fashion industry, and the seemingly critical role they play in the contemporary market, little research has focused on the form and function of celebrity endorsement within the industry (Church-Gibson 2011). While various fashion industry examples have coincidentally appeared in general celebrity

endorsement research, their specific fashion contexts have been neglected. Similarly, papers whose research foci are fashion industry examples have been limited by covering either specific aspects (e.g. Chiosa 2013 – celebrities in fashion advertising) or specific cases (e.g. Bergström & Skärfstad 2005 – study of J.Lindeberg) with little wider reference to the broad nature of celebrity endorsement or general application within fashion marketing practice. This research, therefore, studies the diversity of celebrity endorsement as it exists specifically within the fashion marketplace, with the aim being to provide a critical understanding of the nature and scope of fashion celebrity endorsement. In order to achieve this, a contemporary definition of ‘celebrity endorsement’ will be proposed, and its application within the fashion sector explored. An understanding of the nature of relationships between celebrities and fashion brands will be developed and the research will propose a typology representing the contemporary nature of celebrity endorsement within fashion.

Literature Review

Celebrity Endorsement and Celebrities

McCracken (1989, p.310) offers a definition of the celebrity endorser which is popular in subsequent literature: “[the 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”. While this definition usefully encapsulates the basic principal of celebrity endorsement, it pre-supposes an understanding of celebrity, especially in context of contemporary social and cultural contexts commonly (and sometime pejoratively) described by academia and the media as ‘celebrity obsessed’ (e.g. Matlby et al 2003; Mole 2009; Esch 2013; Stein 2013). Chakraborty and Agrawal (2010) defined a celebrity as an individual who enjoys public recognition by a large number of people, with this public recognition being founded on the individual’s particular achievements, skills or other notable and tangible characteristics (Schlecht 2003). This definition implies a sense of the celebrity being recognised by the public at large for a specific attribute or accomplishment, an impression that perhaps is overly simplistic – one may be recognised for something, or indeed even be famous, without necessarily being a celebrity (Pringle 2004; Kurzman et al 2007; van Krieken 2012).

Boorstin (1962, p.57) was the first to identify celebrities as being “known for [their] well knownness”, while van Krieken (2012) suggests celebrities must not merely be famous (i.e. recognised), but must also possess some social or cultural currency that drives public interest and conversation (i.e. to be celebrated – a celebrity). In contemporary terms, this means that while many celebrities are recognised for tangible and ostensibly spontaneous sporting, entertainment or professional achievements, others are the product of a cultural industry rooted in media and marketing enterprise (Kurzman et al 2007). Paris Hilton is cited as exemplifying the contemporary iteration of celebrity;

her achievements (as a TV presenter, actress and model) are the result of her fame, rather than its cause (Fahy 2007; Fairclough 2008). This example has been followed by the emergence of individuals whose celebrity has been inspired by appearances on reality television or in social media (Holmes 2005a); ‘ordinary people’ who are “extracted from everyday life and processed for stardom” (Turner 2006 p.154) often despite scant tangible accomplishment. Similarly, popular interest in specific celebrities, their lifestyles and in the concept of celebrity generally, has propagated a slew of digital and print celebrity or ‘gossip’ media such as Heat and TMZ.com (Turner 2006). These provide insight to celebrity lifestyles and propagate the concept of celebrity itself, often by focusing on the controversial aspects of the celebrities’ lives while simultaneously promoting their glamorous lifestyles, romantic liaisons and consumer choices (Holmes 2005b; Feasy 2006).

Therefore, a contemporary definition of celebrity must acknowledge that not only must the individual be popularly recognised, he or she must also possess social or cultural currency to motivate popular interest and media exposure, without necessarily having specific professional achievements or personal attributes independent of the individual’s celebrity status. In turn, therefore, a ‘fashion celebrity endorser’ must be such an individual who is popularly associated by consumers with particular fashion brands or products on a promotional basis.

Historical Context and Contemporary Role

Celebrity endorsement, as a commercial phenomenon evidenced primarily in advertising, has existed since at least the 1800s (Kaikati 1987; Garthwaite 2014), albeit in a limited form. It was the development of print and broadcast mass media during the 1900s that facilitated the emergence of entertainers, athletes and other successful people as ‘celebrities’, and in turn triggered the appeal of these people as promoters of brands, products and services in the diversity of ways we would today understand (McDonough 1995, Church-Gibson 2011). In general consumer marketing, Chiosa (2013) estimated that 15% of all advertising in the 1970s featured celebrities, rising to 25% in the 1990s and becoming, by the 21st century, pre-eminent within general consumer product advertising (Ang & Dubelaar 2006; Şimşek 2014). Just as the initial emergence of celebrity endorsement was fuelled by the growth of traditional media, so the contemporary relevance of the phenomenon has been propagated by the spread of digital and social media (Turner 2006; Marwick 2013)

Pringle (2004) reports that a well-executed celebrity endorsement strategy may return over 20 times its cost in terms of extra sales, while specific instances of celebrity endorsement have been noted as being extraordinarily successful in commercial terms (Erdogan 1999; Schlect 2003; Silvera & Austad 2004; Keel & Nataraajan 2012). The general motive for the apparent proliferation of celebrity endorsement as a means of promotion is therefore self-evident; “Brands often use celebrities to get

impact” (Chiosa 2014 p.18). That impact may ultimately be apparent in the brand’s bottom line, but is likely to be also evidenced in consumer awareness of the brand, its perceived image and position, initial customer purchase, and in longer-term customer loyalty (Till 1998; Spry et al 2011). The literature indicates that these effects are the result of two attributes celebrities bring to a brand. Firstly, by dint of their extensive media coverage and corresponding high profile among the public, celebrities draw attention to the brands they are associated with (Tom et al 1992; Erdogan 1999; Keel et al 2012), thus introducing consumers to products they were possibly previously not aware of. Secondly, as a result of the glamorous lifestyle affiliations associated with many celebrities, consumers perceive brands and products associated with those celebrities as being more prestigious, of higher quality or otherwise more desirable (Keller 1993; Batra & Homer 2004; Spry et al 2011), thus causing them to be more likely to purchase the product or pay a premium to acquire it. These effects are obviously magnified when considered in context of extremely competitive markets (Agrawal & Kamakura 1995; Barney 1995; Silvera & Austad 2004; Ghodeswar 2008), and product categories associated with concepts of style, status and seasonal new product development (Sheth 1995; Erdem & Keane 1996; Bush et al 2004; Carroll 2009).

In practical terms, while the literature notes celebrities as endorsing products and brands in a variety of ways, this has rarely been the focus of research. Chiosa (2013) summarises the variety of ways in which celebrities may endorse a product: explicitly, where the celebrity overtly promotes the product; implicitly, where the celebrity is perceived to use the product; imperatively, where the celebrity impels the product; and co-presentationally, where the celebrity is pictured alongside the product. The practical distinctions between these forms of celebrity endorsement are not made clear, highlighting one of the key weaknesses evident in the literature; most of the research on celebrity endorsement assumes the endorsement occurs only in the form of advertising. Pringle (2004) is an exception in identifying ways in which a celebrity may endorse a brand beyond simply appearing in advertising; the celebrity may be a customer, products may be placed alongside the celebrity at appearances, the celebrity may provide a testimonial for the brand, the celebrity may be sponsored by the brand, be employed by the brand, or even own the brand (see fig.1). This interpretation of endorsement demonstrates the potential diversity of opportunities available for collaboration between celebrities and brands in marketing terms, both ‘above’ and ‘below the line’. However Pringle’s (2004) characterisation lacks contextualisation depending on the nature of the market sector and offers limited insight to the nature and practice of each type of endorsement. It does imply the need to augment the original definition of the celebrity endorser to incorporate activities beyond simply advertising.

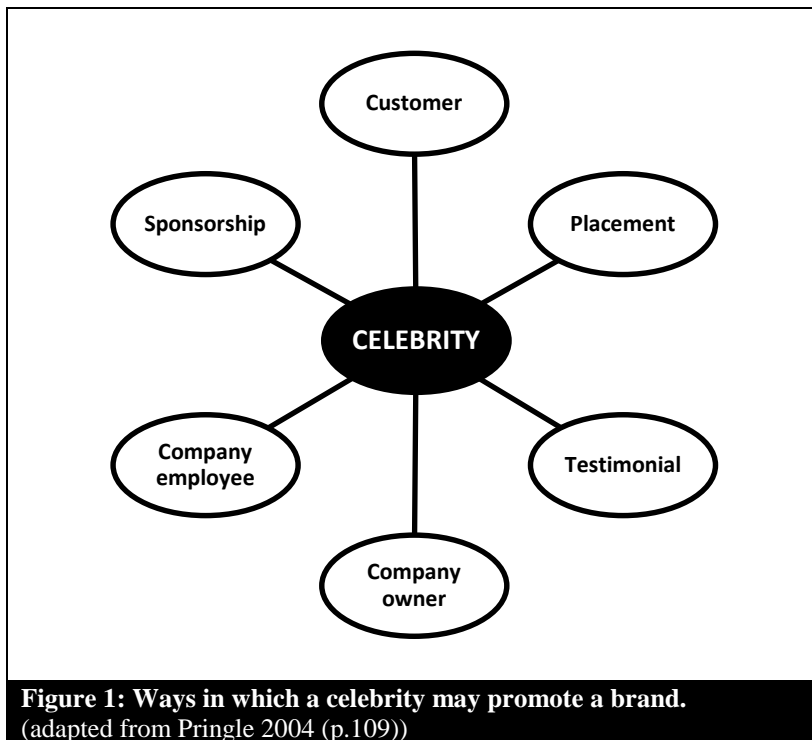


Figure 1: Ways in which a celebrity may promote a brand.
(adapted from Pringle 2004 (p.109))

Celebrities and Fashion

As noted in the introduction, the relationship between fashion and celebrity is almost inviolable (Epstien 2007; Barron 2007; Warner 2014). The reasons for this are intrinsic to the nature of both the fashion industry and the concept of celebrity, and to the relationship of each with the media (Church-Gibson 2011). As a commercial enterprise, the fashion sector is recognised as being highly competitive with successful participants noted for their expertise in creating, manipulating and promoting distinctive and desirable brand images among consumers (Kort et al 2008; McColl & Moore 2010; Wigley et al 2013). In sociological terms, fashion products are regarded as high-involvement purchases closely connected to sentiments of self-image, social status and cultural identity (Fairhurst et al 1989; O’Cass 2004). Hence celebrities, with their pervasive media coverage and popular associations with notions of glamour, success and attractiveness, are natural partners for fashion brands seeking to convey attractive lifestyle affiliations and hence tap into consumers’ liking for easily understood archetypes in advertising (Epstein 2007; Carroll 2009; Ceballos & Villegas 2014). In a saturated, marketing-orientated sector such as fashion, promoting products deemed critical to consumers’ social standing and function, celebrity endorsement is recognised as being not only more likely to occur, but also more likely to be successful (Kahle and Homer 1985; Erdogan 1999; Sandhu et al 2014).

The relationship between celebrities and fashion may become symbiotic; brands benefit from the attention celebrities bring them, while celebrities not only earn considerable sums via endorsement

deals, but also enhance their own reputations thanks to their association with the apparent glamour world of fashion (Gibson 2012; Keel & Nataraajan 2012). As such, brands and celebrities have a mutual interest in developing and perpetuating collaboration. The proliferation of fashion, style, celebrity and lifestyle coverage in the media, not to mention the emergence of publications and websites with a specifically 'celebrity' focus, provides brands and celebrities with a convenient platform on which to pursue collaboration (Church-Gibson 2011). Just as the rise of print and broadcast media facilitated the emergence and growth of celebrity endorsement, so too has digital media boosted its contemporary scale and scope. In practical terms this explains not only the consistent popularity of celebrity endorsement in the fashion industry (as noted above) but also the continually-evolving nature of the collaboration between celebrities and fashion brands which will be explored below.

Methodology

As demonstrated during previous sections, the research area is not explicitly defined and as such this paper assumes an exploratory approach to primary data collection. Easterby-Smith et al (1991) note that in such situations, qualitative research lends itself particularly well to exploring and understanding poorly-developed concepts and phenomena. Consequently, primary research was gathered by means of in-depth interviews with nine fashion industry professionals who were qualified to provide insight to the nature and practice of celebrity endorsement. Interviews were carried out with marketing professionals, public relations (PR) agents and senior managers employed by or representing a variety of fashion brands and celebrities; six interviewees were directly employed by fashion brands, two were employed by PR agencies representing fashion industry clients, and one was an agent representing a number of celebrity clients. Although the interviews were conducted in the UK, they represent a diversity of British, European and American brands, mainly in the mid-high end sectors of the fashion market. The interviews, while open-ended and informal in tone in order to engender trust and explore the topic without being restricted by pre-conceived notions, were structured to reflect the issues identified in the literature review. Although interviews were adapted to suit the particular circumstances of each interviewee's experience of celebrity endorsement, in general they were structured so as to investigate the interviewees' understanding of celebrities, and their professional experience, and practice, of celebrity endorsement (including motives for it and its management within their organisations). Follow up interviews were carried out in order to assess the validity of initial findings. Due to the competitive nature of the fashion industry and the sensitive nature of relationships between brands and celebrities, interviewees requested anonymity as a condition of their co-operation. This general methodology has successful precedent in similar fashion marketing research (e.g. McColl & Moore 2010; Wigley et al 2013). Secondary research was

employed to identify examples used to illustrate the findings noted below – the brands and celebrities mentioned throughout are not necessarily those involved in the primary research phase.

Findings and Discussion

Motives for Celebrity Endorsement in Fashion

As noted above, the literature summarises generic motives for celebrity endorsement:

- 1) To draw awareness to the brand or product by using the popular attention commanded by the celebrity to leverage media coverage and consumer attention.
- 2) To reinforce brand image or positioning by associating the brand or product with the popularly perceived success, lifestyle affiliations or attractiveness of the celebrity.
- 3) To drive sales of the brand or product by using the perceived qualities of the celebrity to convince undecided customers and enhance consumer loyalty.

Each interviewee was asked to name a specific motive for their work with celebrities; although none mentioned one exclusively, the most common answers were to benefit from the high-profile of celebrity and to increase awareness of and desire in the brand among the target market. When shown the list of generic motives noted above, all interviewees acknowledged each as having a logical rationale. However, it became apparent that the brands rarely thought of enacting celebrity endorsement according to such specific motives, for three reasons. Firstly, for the majority of interviewees, their collaboration with celebrities was ongoing either in terms of long-standing relationships with several or in terms of constantly identifying and working with new celebrities. Secondly, the pace of work, especially in liaising with the media, meant that interviewees were unlikely to formally discuss the motives for a particular celebrity endorsement in a formally structured way with colleagues. Finally, a number of interviewees simply stated to the effect of “we use celebrities because that’s what fashion brands do, it’s what our competitors do and it’s what our customers expect”. Exceptions to this approach are apparent in specific sectors of the fashion market and in specific instances of celebrity endorsement. For example, one interviewee employed by an established but growing online retailer discussed how her employer’s first venture into a high-profile celebrity endorsement was discussed by senior management: “they were very clear that the decision to work with [the celebrity] was motivated by a desire to get the brand better recognised by consumers and create a real splash in the market to say we’re serious about style”. Another interviewee, a PR agent representing a small directional fashion brand, noted that the brand approached her with the aspiration of gaining media coverage and getting the brand aligned with key style influencers. At the opposite end of the scale, an interviewee employed by a large European luxury brand noted that his

employer's decision to work with particular celebrities was usually motivated by a specific motive connected to the company's overall marketing strategy, for example a desire to push sales in a specific geographic region. However, even so, he went on to explain that "the motive for using celebrities is so obvious and long-established as part of our long-term strategy that we'd talk less about 'why', and more about 'who, when, and how'".

These findings reinforce the sense of celebrity endorsement being so commonplace within fashion that its rationale in terms of motives are either so well recognised so as to not merit discussion, or considered such standard practice that the decision becomes a routine operational matter; a fourth motive might be that of 'follow my leader' – that fashion brands enact celebrity endorsement simply because they feel it is essential within the market. Similarly, the fact of only brands who are relatively new to celebrity endorsement, or who are comparatively small, or who are committing significant funds to a specific campaign formally discuss the motives of celebrity endorsement at senior management level implies that celebrity endorsement is considered so routine that its practice has been delegated or entrusted to relatively junior employees.

Selecting a Celebrity Endorser

The interviewee employed by a luxury brand noted that senior management would have a more in-depth conversation in respect of the identity of a celebrity. This was mirrored in the experience of most interviewees, who reported that choosing a celebrity was could be a drawn out process in some instances. A variety of means of choosing a celebrity are outlined in the literature (e.g. Miciak & Shanklin 1994; Khatri 2006; Hollensen & Schimmelpfennig 2013), all founded on different elements of salience between the celebrities' apparent qualities, image and lifestyle, and those desired by the brand being endorsed. When discussing the celebrity selection process, all respondents agreed that this was a key means of shortlisting potential celebrities. However many interviewees noted that the profusion of celebrity endorsement, a diffused fashion and media market, and more sophisticated consumers meant further consideration was required; a respondent from a luxury brand noted that 'their' celebrities all reflected a distinctive image, some were selected on basis of having a more niche or 'edgy' appeal; "we are more daring in choosing celebrities because today's customers are more sophisticated, younger, and open-minded". This has led the brand to working in particular with music artists and sports stars whose lifestyles reflect less stereotypically and conservative 'upper-class' values and emphasise individuality and social diversity. This trend has emerged as brands seek resonance with different customer groups, and was reflected in many of the interviews. One interview representing a mid-market fast-fashion brand noted that because their customer base was international, multi-cultural, and ranged from 15-65 year olds, selecting one universally-relevant celebrity was difficult. This was firstly because few celebrities have universal resonance with all

consumers, and secondly because those who are widely recognised and respected tend to be in demand and therefore expensive. In addition, the speed of change in music, entertainment and sports, and the depth of coverage they are given in online media, complicates celebrity selection. All interviewees noted that choosing celebrities was a much quicker process today, driven partly by an instinctive understanding of the brand and its customers, and most interviewees noted they would rather select a variety of celebrities in the hope of appealing to diverse customer profiles; “our customer is informed and empowered, she follows trends but seeks uniqueness in her fashion choices”, commented one interviewee who noted how celebrities are chosen not just for their status and broad appeal, but for their “edgy individuality, provocative stances on social issues, and ability to excite online-following and set trends among some audiences, even if others find them less appealing”. Interviewees also reported that over the past decade, celebrities have typically become more proactive in seeking endorsement opportunities, rather than waiting for brands to approach them.

Although high-end fashion brands retain a more selective process of celebrity selection, for mid-market brands the demands of consumers’ social, cultural and demographic diversity and the pressures of media coverage obliges fashion brands to select a wider range of celebrities more quickly and sometimes more reactively. This has fuelled the evident popularity of celebrity endorsement in fashion by opening endorsement opportunities to more celebrities, and in turn diversifying celebrity endorsement practice.

Classification of Fashion Celebrity Endorsers

Without exception, interviewees described a ‘celebrity’ as being a person of high profile among specific (small or large) groups of people. When asked to elaborate on the nature or source of that fame and profile, three types of fashion celebrity endorser could be identified; each defined by their overall profile and likely cost (Fig.2):

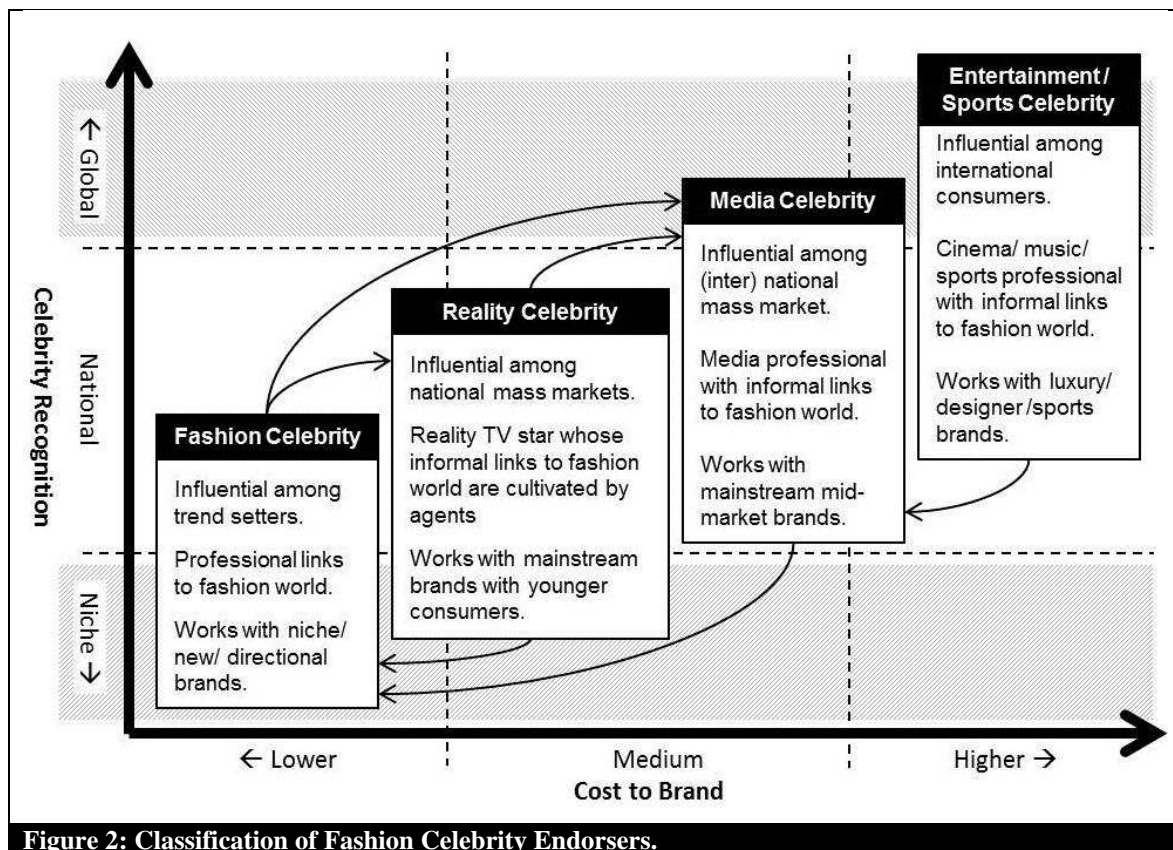


Figure 2: Classification of Fashion Celebrity Endorsers.

- 1) The 'Fashion Celebrity': these celebrities may have only niche recognition among the most dedicated fashion consumers, and their celebrity status may derive from professional or semi-professional activities related to the fashion industry; they may be bloggers, stylists, or fashion journalist. While possibly not popularly recognisable among mass-market consumers, their status as fashion innovators or trend-setters, in addition to their 'insider' status in the industry mean they have a significant role as endorsers, especially for smaller and less mainstream brands. Formal collaboration may be affordable as these celebrities may regard such work as part of their normal activities, as a means of advancing their careers or those of industry friends, or simply as a 'perk'. An example from the UK market may be Alexa Chung (Antipodium / New Look / DKNY / etc.), whose personal style and relationships in the media was significant to her emergence as an implicit and explicit endorser, rather than the latter prompting her role as an endorser. Further examples may be in fashion bloggers (such as Susanna Lau or Chiara Ferragni) whose online following and personal style have prompted following by specific groups of fashion consumers and enabled implicit endorsement without necessarily having the wider mainstream fame conventional celebrities may have.
- 2) The 'Reality Celebrity': these celebrities may have wider recognition among consumers, with their fame deriving from ostensibly coincidental appearances on reality TV shows and the subsequent development of a media profile and semi-professional activities. Endorsement on

a formal level by these celebrities may be relatively affordable as they may regard collaboration as a mutually-beneficial opportunity to develop their media profile and to commercially benefit in the face of a possibly short-lived celebrity status. Businesses using reality celebrities are likely to be mainstream brands orientated toward younger consumers. The most obvious example (although now elevated to almost universal fame) may be Kim Kardashian, with UK-specific examples being Amy Childs (Ultimo / Lipsy) and Millie Mackintosh (ASOS / Dorothy Perkins).

- 3) The 'Media Celebrity': these celebrities may have national or developing international recognition among mainstream consumers, and their status may be derived from professional activities in the media, for example as a TV presenter. Many of these celebrities, having an income independent of endorsement, are likely to be more selective in formally collaborating with fashion brands, and therefore the costs for a brand would be higher. Businesses collaborating with media celebrities are likely to be mainstream brands catering to the mid-market in the UK. British examples may be Fearne Cotton and Hollie Willoughby (Very.com), whose popularity as TV presenters and consequently carefully-managed style qualified both as fashion endorsers.
- 4) The 'Entertainment/Sports Celebrity': these celebrities may have national or international fame, with their popular profile deriving from success as an entertainer or sports professional, for example a singer, actor or tennis player. These celebrities, having personal wealth independent of endorsement and usually having an intensive professional schedule, are likely to demand high payment for formal endorsement. Businesses most likely to use these celebrities would be luxury or designer brands with an international customer base, global mainstream brands or larger sportswear brands. Examples of this category may be in the tennis player Andy Murray (Fred Perry / Adidas), actors Julia Roberts (Givenchy) and Gerard Butler (Hugo Boss), or musicians Beyonce (H&M) and Jay-Z (Reebok).

This classification does not include models who may acquire celebrity consequent to their professional activities. It also does not exclude a celebrity going from one categorisation to another as their career develops, the definitions of each in terms of cost and recognition are not absolute, and the previously-noted diversity of consumers allows celebrities to successfully endorse even while not fitting ideally into one category. However the typology does indicate the range of celebrities who are potentially available for a fashion brand. One interviewee confirmed this, noting that "every day there's an emerging actress, or a new reality TV contestant, or just someone who is the new 'it' girl". The range and diversity of celebrities existing today was acknowledged as being difficult to follow on a practical basis, especially in regard of the younger market – as noted when discussing celebrity selection. An interviewee representing a young women's fashion brand admitted it was difficult to identify the right celebrity thanks to the speed of their emergence, especially on non-traditional digital

media. However, the same range of celebrities offered a commensurate range of opportunities for the brands: “Basically, celebrities make our job much easier” commented the marketing manager of one brand, going on to explain how different celebrities could be used to satisfy different marketing objectives. An agent representing a number of celebrities augmented this by stating that her clients, and their different personalities, qualities and levels of consumer interest, “represent ways for fashion brands to reach different customers in a variety of ways”.

Typology of Fashion Celebrity Endorsement

This point led onto discussion of the nature of celebrity endorsement. It became apparent that the interviewees had a much more broad understanding of celebrity endorsement practice than evident in the literature. McCrackin’s (1989) definition of celebrity endorsement was shown to each interviewee and they unanimously commented to the effect of “celebrity endorsement isn’t just advertising”. Although acknowledging that celebrities often appeared in advertising, all interviewees asserted that their work with celebrities occurred in a variety of ways and different levels of collaboration. This finding appears to confirm the gap in the literature regarding the specific nature of endorsement undertaken by a celebrity, and compels augmentation of McCrackin’s (1989) definition, to become:

“[the 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 or other form of promotional activity or initiative”.

Representatives of all but the high-end brands noted high cost as a disadvantage of celebrity endorsement occurring in formal advertising campaigns. However, this did not exclude them from celebrity endorsement practice as they sought more efficient means of collaboration, including no- and low-cost activities such as seeding/gifting, press-clipping and public relations (PR) collaboration. These overcome the obstacles of advertising cost, and the expense of contracting celebrities on a formal basis; “my clients use celebrities in our promotions quite regularly, but they’re rarely actually paid for or appear in their advertising” noted an interviewee from a PR agency. Instead, her services include a press-clipping facility for her clients which involves the collation of appearances in the media by her clients’ products worn when by celebrities, and these snippets being further distributed on social, online and print media; thus the coincidence of a celebrity simply wearing a product they have purchased may be promoted as endorsing that brand. In turn, a large part of fashion brands’ (and their agents’) PR activity is devoted to the practice of seeding or gifting – either pro-actively or reactively giving celebrities products in the hope that they will be worn during media appearances. An interviewee representing a footwear brand noted the success of this practice, explaining that as his business had no money for formal collaboration with celebrities, he had simply compiled list of

celebrities' shoe sizes and sent them a pair each. This paid off when Kate Moss was photographed wearing the distinctive sandals shortly afterward, promoting “an explosive” growth in sales. This proactive approach to gifting may be complimented by gifting events, when fashion brands collaborate with the organisers of events to fill celebrity attendees' gift bags, or simply invite celebrities to private ‘open house’ events where they may select products they like. These practices have become increasingly popular among all but the highest-end brands, emphasising the power of the media's coverage of celebrity style. The interviewee representing a number of celebrities also reported that fashion brands were increasingly more responsive to her clients' requests for product gifts and loans with the implicit understanding that the cost of gifting a single product could result in thousands of similar products being sold.

Another cost-effective form of celebrity endorsement involves the celebrity participating in events hosted by the fashion brand, such as appearing as a guest at runway shows, store openings and sponsored parties. An interviewee for a premium womenswear brand noted that London Fashion Week (LFW), for example, was an opportunity not only to launch new collections, but to promote the brand by hosting selected celebrities at shows and after parties; “if you look at the majority of media reports for LFW, it's not all about new collections, it's about who was in the FROW, who was at the after-party, what were they wearing?”. Again, such activities guarantee celebrity profile without necessarily formally (and expensively) contracting a celebrity – they may wish to attend for professional or social reasons.

At the opposite end of the scale, celebrity endorsement may involve more than simply advertising. This practice is common among large, commercially successful and high-end fashion brands, and involves the brand and celebrity sharing a longer-term relationship. For brands wishing to present consistent values or an implication of heritage, this form of collaboration is expensive but successful. “We are above the everyday, our heritage is one of consistency and style, so we wish to work on a long-term with celebrities who reflect that timelessness”, explained the interviewee from a luxury brand when discussing the length of its collaboration with specific celebrities. In these longer-term relationships, the celebrity will not only appear in advertising, but may also attend product launches, store openings and promotional events, and even be contracted to wear and/or mention the brand in formal media appearances over a number of years.

It is evident that celebrity endorsement in fashion may be practiced in one of four main ways, each involving increasing cost for the brand and more depth to the collaboration in terms of marketing effort, contractual agreement and collaborative involvement with the celebrity (Figure 3):

- 1) PR-based Celebrity Endorsement – the celebrity is gifted a product or products either by simply sending the products or by inviting the celebrity to select it. The celebrity will then (hopefully) be covered in the media wearing the product, thus creating an implicit form or

endorsement at low cost to the brand. Requires no formal involvement with the brand and predicated on a degree of luck and coincidence.

- 2) Events-based Celebrity Endorsement – the celebrity is invited, or contracted for a small fee, to attend an event organised and hosted by the brand. The celebrity may be encouraged or obliged to wear the brand, but his or her appearance at it (including formal media photo-calls) will create an implicit endorsement at relatively low cost. Involves only loose and possibly informal involvement between the brand and the celebrity.
- 3) Advertising-based Celebrity Endorsement – the celebrity is contracted over a short period of time (e.g. one season or one year) to appear in formally-arranged photoshoots to be used in advertising campaigns, thus creating an explicit endorsement at a medium to high cost. The celebrity may appear at a limited range of events on a formal basis in addition to the advertising. Demands a relatively high level of involvement between brand and celebrity including a formally-contracted agreement.
- 4) Brand Ambassador-based Celebrity Endorsement – the celebrity is contracted over a longer period of time (e.g. four seasons or longer) to make a series of formal appearances at events hosted by the brand, appear in advertising and other promotional activities, and possibly involve the brand in other aspects of their professional and social lives, thus forming an explicit endorsement at higher cost. Demands a very high level of involvement between brand and celebrity including detailed formal contractual agreement.

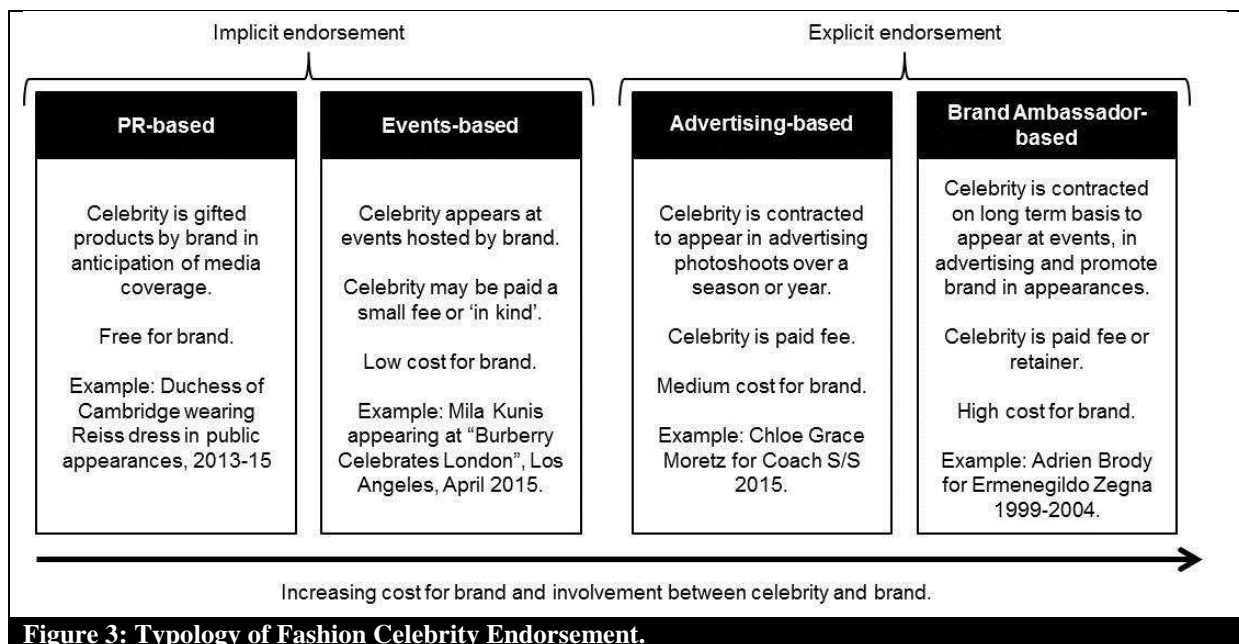


Figure 3: Typology of Fashion Celebrity Endorsement.

Conclusions

The interviews confirmed that celebrity endorsement is important in and to the fashion market. Indeed there seemed to be a consensus agreement that endorsement, in various forms and integrated within a comprehensive marketing strategy, was the most significant contemporary way in which a fashion brand may promote itself to consumers. As a strategy, it offers versatility and flexibility to brands and may be employed for little cost. Accordingly, it is popular not just among the bigger brands which can afford to contract celebrities and advertise in the media, but offers an attractive means by which smaller brands may gain profile and position themselves in the minds of consumers. Of particular note is the fractured and diffused media environment, and indeed wider fashion market. Although this complicates fashion promotion as there are no longer the 'default' fashion and lifestyle magazine in which to advertise, social- and digital media and the emergence of niche magazines offer a platform on which brands may offer distinctive messages about themselves to small but influential groups of fashion consumers. Celebrity endorsement is key to this, not only via its potentially low cost, but for the range of opportunities it offers smaller brands to form relationships with celebrities who resonate with specific clusters of consumers. For larger brands, the more conventional means of celebrity endorsement, as previously explored in the literature, remain popular and powerful in influencing customers. In the global marketplace, those brands which occupy the highest profiles are in competition not just for consumers, but also for the attention of the world's biggest celebrities. Again, the power of celebrities to convincingly influence consumers is apparent.

Developed from McCrackin's (1989) definition, this paper defines a fashion celebrity endorser as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement or other form of promotional activity or initiative on behalf of a fashion brand or product". The paper has captured the contemporary nature of celebrity endorsement in fashion by proposing a typology (figure 3) composed of four types of celebrity endorsement – PR-based, Events-based, Advertising-based and Brand Ambassador-based. With reference to the financial and marketing management competencies at their disposal, any or several of these may be profitably employed by any fashion brand. The typology broadens the scope of celebrity endorsement practice away from the previous literature's strong implication of it being solely advertising based. By emphasising the implicit and explicit forms of endorsement connected respectively to 'under-' and 'above-the-line' forms of promotion, the typology offers scope for further celebrity endorsement research in and outside the fashion sector. Accordingly, a new definition of celebrity endorsement has been proposed which includes promotional activities as well as simply advertising. Finally, the classification of fashion celebrity endorsers offers original insight to the practice of endorsement by examining the nature of the celebrities involved in the fashion market.

Limitations and Further Research

The research, like all, is limited by the bounds of time and space. The interviews represent a very small sample of fashion industry professionals and brands and cannot be assumed to represent their full diversity. Most significantly, the majority of the research has involved brands operating in the British market, celebrities and consumers, and thus other countries' experiences may differ. The quantitative methodology followed was appropriate in understanding and exploring the nature of the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement in the fashion industry, however quantitative research may be necessary in understanding its scale and assessing the conclusions offered in this paper. The linked phenomenon of fashion brands and celebrities co-developing specific collections of clothing was beyond the remit of the paper but offers scope for considerable further research. At a wider level, the evident scale and scope of celebrity endorsement in the fashion market offers rich opportunities for future researchers.

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