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### Consumers and Their Celebrity Brands: How Personal Narratives Set the Stage for Attachment

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**Consumers and Their Celebrity Brands: How Personal Narratives Set the Stage for Attachment**

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research demonstrates how consumer attachment to celebrity brands is driven by perceived narratives about the celebrity's persona, which triggers communal (i.e., altruistic) relationship norms. The research investigates the differential role of narratives about celebrities' personal vs. professional lives in creating attachment, and identifies and tests moderating effects of narrative characteristics including perceived source of fame, valence and authenticity.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Three online experiments tested the proposed direct, mediating, and moderating relationships. Data was analyzed using mediation analysis and multiple ANOVAs.

**Findings** – Results suggest relationship norms that are more altruistic in nature fully mediate the relationship between narrative type and brand attachment. Additionally, personal narratives produce stronger attachment than professional narratives; the celebrity's source of fame moderates narrative type and attachment; and on-brand narratives elicit higher attachment than off-brand narratives, even when these narratives are negative.

**Practical implications** – We offer recommendations for how marketers can shape celebrity brand narratives to build stronger consumer attachment. Notably, personal (vs. professional) narratives are critical in building attachment, especially for celebrity brands that are perceived to have achieved their fame. Both positive and negative personal narratives can strengthen attachment for achieved celebrity brands, but only if they are on-brand with consumer expectations.

**Originality/value** – This research is an introductory examination of the fundamental theoretical process by which celebrity brand relationships develop from brand persona narratives, and how characteristics of those narratives influence consumer-brand attachment.

### Keywords:

celebrity brand, brand relationship, narratives, attachment, brand persona, parasocial relationship, brand authenticity, narrative transportation, human brand

### Paper Type:

Research paper

## Consumers and Their Celebrity Brands: How Personal Narratives Set the Stage for Attachment

*I'm not a businessman. I'm a business, man.* – Jay-Z, *Diamonds from Sierra Leone (Remix)*

Celebrities hold an increasingly powerful place in society, industry, and marketing due to the emergence of social media. In contrast to pre-social media diffusion models, recent studies demonstrate adoption rarely results from chains of referral and instead is generated by a few select, elite and dominant influencers (Goel *et al.*, 2012). Research shows 92% of millennials trust social media from celebrity influencers over traditional advertising or endorsement (Weinswig, 2016). Celebrities are no longer simply tools for product endorsements, but are brands in and of themselves – celebrity brands, or *high-profile individuals who derive equity from their fame*. For example, Kylie Jenner became the world's youngest self-made billionaire at age 21 by leveraging her celebrity brand (Robehmed, 2019).

As with products, marketers of celebrities seek to build consumer attachment to the brand. However, unlike product brands that build attachment through positive experiences with the product itself, physical barriers usually limit direct interaction with a celebrity. As a result, it is the consumer's perceptions of a celebrity's persona that likely will constitute the totality of a consumer's experience with a celebrity brand. Celebrity personas are created through narratives, which are defined as *the consumption of a celebrity brand's story through which the story receiver interprets it in a causal story-like structure*. In essence, persona narratives about the celebrity's professional and personal lives form the celebrity's brand in consumers' perceptions (Centeno and Wang, 2017). Thus, a relationship between a consumer and a celebrity can be viewed more accurately as a relationship between the consumer and the celebrity's brand (Luo *et al.*, 2010).

This research focuses on persona narratives as building blocks of the consumer-celebrity

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3 brand relationship. We use a series of three experiments to address two key questions: (1) What  
4 is the theoretical process by which celebrity brand narratives create consumer-brand attachment?  
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6 (2) What types of celebrity brand narratives build the strongest consumer-brand attachment? Our  
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8 goal is to provide marketing professionals with guidance on how to craft celebrity narratives to  
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10 build the strongest consumer-brand attachment.  
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15 To answer the first question, we draw upon narrative transportation theory, which  
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17 suggests that consumers immersed in a narrative world show durable emotional, cognitive and  
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19 behavioral effects (Gerrig, 1993). We propose that when celebrity brand narratives mirror  
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21 interpersonal relationships, one behavioral effect may be the activation of communal  
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23 interpersonal relationship norms, in which expectations of relationship behavior are altruistically  
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25 based on our relationship partner's needs rather than repayment or economic exchange  
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27 (Aggarwal, 2004). In turn, the emotional-cognitive response of brand attachment may then result  
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29 from the activation of these relationship norms. However, attachment is not simply a result of  
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31 admiration for a celebrity's professional exploits (that is, their "professional" narrative). Given  
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33 the preponderance of paparazzi photos and celebrity baby-bump tweets, the public also  
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35 consumes narratives about celebrities' personal lives (their "personal" narratives). Brand  
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37 attachment is created when the consumer perceives positive brand valence, relevance and  
38  
39 salience (Park *et al.*, 2013). Since personal narratives convey information about the celebrity  
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41 brand that is perceived as relatable, purportedly revealing of the celebrity's veridical (i.e., true)  
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43 identity, and which is similar to information received from an altruistic relationship, these  
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45 narratives should be meaningful and identifiable, thus strengthening attachment.  
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52 Therefore, Study 1 isolates the effects of professional and personal narratives to  
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54 determine if and when these narratives trigger relationship norms that generate attachment.  
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3 Studies 2 and 3 investigate moderating factors that provide stronger brand attachment across  
4 different narrative contexts. Study 2 tests the effects of perceived source of fame, demonstrating  
5 that personal narratives in which the consumer perceives that the celebrity brand's source of  
6 fame is *achieved* through talent create stronger levels of attachment than narratives in which  
7 fame is *attributed* to the celebrity brand by societal institutions (such as news, social media or  
8 reality TV) despite a lack of talent or professional achievement. Study 3 tests the role of the  
9 authenticity of a celebrity brand narrative by developing a 2×2 typology of personal narratives,  
10 categorized by whether the narrative's valence is perceived as negative or positive, and by  
11 whether the narrative is perceived as true to the brand's identity (on-brand or off-brand). We find  
12 that even negative narratives can build relationships as long as the narratives are perceived as on-  
13 brand, thus demonstrating that "all publicity is good publicity" for celebrity brands except for  
14 negative narratives that are off-brand with consumer expectations.  
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31 This research adds to our understanding of the fundamental theoretical process of how  
32 consumer relationships with celebrity brands develop from persona narratives, especially  
33 personal narratives. Our research demonstrates that celebrity brand narratives transport  
34 consumers to a world in which they develop attachment as if they were in an interpersonal  
35 relationship with the celebrity. Moreover, the investigation of the moderating effects of  
36 perceived narrative characteristics (professional vs. personal, achieved vs. attributed sources of  
37 fame, positive vs. negative valence, and authenticity) guide marketers about how to structure and  
38 frame celebrity brand persona narratives in order to drive strong consumer-brand relationships.  
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### 49 **CELEBRITY BRAND RELATIONSHIPS**

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51 A celebrity gains public attention through a definable and marketable personality. The  
52 more public attention a celebrity receives, the greater the potential value of their celebrity  
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(Rindova *et al.*, 2006; Boorstin, 1962). Thus, like product brands, celebrities attain their value from consumers' abilities to identify them and differentiate them from others. The marketing literature has theorized that celebrities can be thought of as brands for four reasons: 1) celebrities are professionally managed, 2) they have a consumer base, 3) they signal some type of expected quality, and 4) there is revenue premium in their celebrity (Luo *et al.*, 2010; Thomson 2006).

*Celebrity brand* is differentiated here from the broader construct of a *human brand* (e.g., Thomson, 2006), which may include not only celebrities, but also ordinary individuals who use branding strategies to market themselves for career advancement purposes (e.g., Parmentier *et al.* 2013). Unlike celebrity brands, these individuals lack the public attention and media coverage that characterize celebrity. Thus, celebrity brand is defined here as *a publicly-known and professionally managed persona whose equity stems from his/her ability to be identified by a consumer base as distinct from others.*

For the average consumer, physical barriers limit personal interaction with a celebrity, thus, it is the consumer's engagement with the celebrity brand's persona narrative that creates most, if not all, of their perceptions of the celebrity. In essence, narratives conveying the celebrity's persona to consumers create the celebrity's brand (Centeno and Wang, 2017). When the celebrity's narrative ends or is no longer compelling, the celebrity brand ceases to be celebrated and its value dwindles (Gabler, 2001). Unlike the actual celebrities themselves, who are human beings, celebrity brands can be immortal because their narratives could be told indefinitely. For example, Elvis Presley passed away long ago, but his celebrity brand lives on through his narratives and brand extensions featuring his persona.

Celebrity brand narratives originate externally from a variety of stakeholders, including marketing practitioners, the celebrities themselves, the media, and other consumers (Centeno and

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2  
3 Wang, 2017). Narratives emanating from these sources are known as *storyteller narratives* (van  
4 Laer *et al.*, 2014). In this context, interested marketing practitioners include not only the  
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6 celebrity's team of agents, managers and publicists, but also those responsible for the marketing  
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8 of affiliated organizations the celebrity represents or interacts with (such film studios, sports  
9  
10 leagues, or music labels) or product brands for which the celebrity serves as influencer or paid  
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12 endorser. Additionally, social media have provided celebrities controllable channels through  
13  
14 which they themselves can distribute narratives. The media, including news outlets, tabloids,  
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16 paparazzi, etc., are another source of external celebrity brand narratives. Like other for-profit  
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18 industries, media businesses are beholden to the demands of their customers (Gamson 1994) and  
19  
20 seek to engage their target audiences by dramatizing celebrity brand events into narrative  
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22 structures (Lippman 1922; Gamson 1994). Finally, social media is not only a channel for  
23  
24 celebrities to convey narratives about themselves, it is also a channel where consumers can share  
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26 (i.e. gossip, tweet, post, etc.) their own celebrity brand narratives with other consumers. Thus,  
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28 consumers also become generators of narrative source material for those with whom they share  
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30 their posts.  
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38 However, consumers of these externally-generated "storyteller" narratives are not simply  
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40 passive receivers of information. As Escalas (2004, p. 169), noted, consumers are "creative story  
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42 builders who do not record the world, but create it." When external sources like marketers or the  
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44 media produce and disseminate a storyteller narrative, it is received and interpreted by  
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46 consumers in a causal story-like structure with a beginning, middle, and end, where goals lead to  
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48 actions that ultimately lead to outcomes (Aron *et al.*, 2004; Escalas, 2004). The result of this  
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50 narrative processing is referred to as a *story receiver narrative* (van Laer *et al.*, 2014). We base  
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52 our definition of celebrity brand narrative on van Laer *et al.*'s (2014) notion of story receiver  
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narratives and the consumption of a narrative, rather than its production, as well as Escalas' (2004) view of narrative processing. To that end, we define celebrity brand narrative as *the consumption of a celebrity brand's story through which the story receiver interprets it in a causal story-like structure.*

Brand knowledge is created through associative learning, a process in which consumers make associations with brands through their experiences with them (Keller, 1993). Meaning is attached to these associations from storyteller narratives and story receiver narratives (Escalas and Bettman, 2017; McCracken, 1989). Narratives carrying meaning form a close self-celebrity brand relationship, as perceived by the consumer (Fournier, 1998). Thus, a relationship between a consumer and a celebrity can be viewed more accurately as a relationship between the consumer and the celebrity's brand, as conveyed and perceived through its narrative. Meanings generated from celebrity brand relationships can produce attachment and because brand attachment is predictive of intention to perform difficult behaviors such as purchase behavior, brand purchase share, and need share, this construct has been dubbed the "ultimate destination for brand relationships" (Park *et al.*, 2010, p. 2). Attachment is reflected by two factors: Self-brand distance and brand prominence (i.e., salience) (Park *et al.*, 2010). A consumer perceives a close celebrity brand relationship when they have positive, highly relevant and personally meaningful memories about a brand (Park *et al.*, 2013) and a self-brand connection is made when a consumer includes the brand as part of their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Following Park *et al.* (2013), celebrity brand attachment is defined here as *the level of closeness to a celebrity brand perceived by a consumer.*

### **CELEBRITY BRAND ATTACHMENT PROCESS**

The proposed celebrity brand attachment process (see figure 1) is grounded in narrative

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2  
3 transportation theory, which suggests that consumers who are immersed in a narrative world can  
4 show effects of their absorption in their actual lives (Gerrig, 1993). The process proposes that a  
5 celebrity brand narrative carries associations about its celebrity's persona, which are perceived  
6 and interpreted by a consumer. When the consumer receives and interprets these narratives,  
7 he/she may be transported to the celebrity brand's world (van Laer *et al.*, 2014). It is in this  
8 transported state where the consumer not only becomes immersed in the narrative world, but  
9 he/she also experiences interpersonal-like relationship norms and then a close connection to the  
10 celebrity brand (Aggarwal, 2004; Park *et al.*, 2013). Attachment to the celebrity brand is  
11 affected, in large part, by how relevant and personally meaningful the narrative is perceived to be  
12 by the consumer, while the strength of the relationship between the persona narrative and  
13 attachment is moderated by the celebrity brand's perceived source of fame narrative.  
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## 34 **THE IMPACT OF CELEBRITY BRAND PERSONA NARRATIVES ON CONSUMER** 35 **ATTACHMENT VIA RELATIONSHIP NORMS**

### 36 *Celebrity Brand Persona Narratives*

37  
38 Unlike conventional firm-based brands (e.g., Apple, Nike, and Polo), celebrity brands  
39 feature a unique fundamental characteristic: They directly represent a person, rather than an  
40 organization. As such, celebrity brands have a *true* identity, an irreducible core referred to as a  
41 *veridical identity* (Rojek, 2001). However, because consumers rarely, if ever, personally interact  
42 with the celebrity, the celebrity's veridical identity is typically unknown to consumers. Instead,  
43 narratives (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016) featuring the celebrity brand's persona - a social  
44 character adopted by an individual identity (Jung, 1923) - are conveyed by stakeholders like  
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3 media outlets and commercial firms to the marketplace and then perceived by consumers.  
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5       These narratives conveying a celebrity brand's persona can be grouped into two types:  
6 professional persona narratives and personal persona narratives. Professional persona narratives  
7 are perceived by consumers as stories of the celebrity brand's social character while at work in  
8 his/her celebrated occupation (e.g., an actor performing in a play, a musician playing guitar in  
9 concert, or an athlete in the Olympics). Personal persona narratives are perceived as a chronicle  
10 of events featuring the celebrity brand's social character while away from his/her primary  
11 occupation (e.g., an actor getting married, taking their child to school, or on a vacation). Persona  
12 narratives are not confined to "Hollywood," as celebrity brands exist in many other industries  
13 such as sport (Carlson and Donovan, 2013), business (Scheidt *et al.*, 2018), fashion (Delisle and  
14 Parmentier, 2016), art (Moulard *et al.*, 2014), and politics (Sanghvi and Hodges, 2015).  
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28       The cultural studies literature suggests that because of barriers to the celebrity brand and  
29 because of celebrities' inherent societal importance as a credible source (Hovland and Weiss,  
30 1951), consumers are motivated to discover a celebrity's veridical identity (Meyers, 2009; Dyer,  
31 1979). Neither professional nor personal narratives may accurately represent the celebrity's  
32 veridical identity (Dion and Arnould, 2015). Still, the primary intention of many personal  
33 narratives created by some institutions, such as the media, is to craft a story that is perceived by  
34 consumers as an accurate telling of the celebrity's veridical identity (Dyer, 1979). Because  
35 personal narratives are intended to be perceived as relatable and identifiable stories featuring an  
36 empathetic side of the celebrity's life, those types of narratives are particularly high in realism  
37 and adept at creating an *illusion of intimacy* in which consumers feel they truly know the  
38 celebrity brand like an interpersonal partner (Schickel, 1985). Thus, narratives featuring the  
39 celebrity's personal life should result in higher levels of transportation and perceptions of  
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3 closeness than professional narratives, due to their relevance and prominence (Green and Brock,  
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5 2000). Consequently, personal narratives should more positively impact attachment than  
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7 professional narratives.  
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10 **H1:** Personal persona narratives produce stronger celebrity brand attachment than  
11 professional persona narratives.  
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### 13 *Celebrity Brand Communal Relationship Norms*

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15 Anthropomorphized brands have been found to automatically prompt consumer goals to  
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17 have a successful social interaction, resulting in the consumer following norms of behaviors from  
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19 his/her interpersonal relationships (Aggarwal and McGill, 2012). Clark and Mills (1979)  
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21 identified two types of relationship norms that exist on a continuum: Exchange relationship  
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23 norms are rules of behavior that govern relationships where benefits are given with the  
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25 expectation of receiving a return benefit as repayment, and communal relationship norms are  
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27 rules of behavior that govern relationships where benefits are altruistically given in response to a  
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29 need of the other relationship partner. Subsequently, communal relationship norms are defined  
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31 here as *the extent to which the rules that govern the giving of benefits to the other partner in a*  
32  
33 *relationship are based on a genuine altruistic concern for the partner.*  
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39 It is proposed that professional narratives are likely to activate lower levels of communal  
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41 relationship norms because they are perceived to more closely mimic exchange relationships,  
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43 while personal narratives are likely to activate higher levels of communal relationship norms  
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45 because they more closely mimic altruistic relationships (Aggarwal, 2004). Professional  
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47 narratives are perceived as more focused on the celebrity brand's perceived talent or  
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49 achievements in their professional occupation. As such, consumers are accustomed to  
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51 exchanging monetary resources with marketers of the celebrity brand to consume the celebrity  
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53 brand's professional work (e.g., movie tickets, athletic tickets, and music albums). Conversely,  
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3 personal narratives are perceived as focused on the celebrity brand's personal life. The everyday  
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5 events of personal narratives more closely mirror events that likely occur in a consumer's  
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7 communal interpersonal relationships (e.g., dating, going to the supermarket, and vacationing). It  
8  
9 is further proposed that narratives that yield stronger relationship norm communality lead to  
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11 stronger celebrity brand attachment. Prior literature in psychology has found that strong feelings  
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13 of closeness (i.e., the primary factor in brand attachment) are highly correlated with strong  
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15 communal relationships (Mills *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, consumers generally save communal  
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17 relationships for partners who are most important to them (Mills and Clark, 1982), which makes  
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19 those relationships higher in brand prominence due to their rarity relative to exchange  
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21 relationships.  
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26 **H2:** Communal relationship norms mediate the relationship between perceived  
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28 persona narratives and celebrity brand attachment, such that perceived personal  
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30 persona narratives produce stronger communal relationship norms and,  
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32 consequently, stronger celebrity brand attachment than perceived professional  
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34 persona narratives.

### 35 **STUDY 1**

36  
37 Given the pervasiveness of celebrity brand narratives in modern culture, consumers of  
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39 celebrity brand narratives, at large, were selected as the population of interest in this research  
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41 project. Study 1 explores H1 by using an online experiment to isolate the effects of professional  
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43 and personal persona narratives on celebrity brand consumers' attachment levels for a fictional  
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45 celebrity brand, an actor in his early 30s named Michael Fredrick. Study 1 also explores H2 by  
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47 investigating whether professional and personal persona narrative types elicit varying levels of  
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49 altruistic relationship norms which, in turn, elicit varying levels of celebrity brand attachment.  
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51 Although "real" celebrity brands and celebrity brand narratives are abundantly available,  
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53 experimental manipulations using a fictitious celebrity brand allowed for tighter control,  
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3 isolation, and manipulation of the narrative perceptions and thus provided more internally valid  
4 measurement of their effects.  
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### 7 *Subjects and Design*

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10 A total of 116 subjects from an online panel (Amazon's Mechanical Turk [MTurk])  
11 participated in the study for a payment of \$1 US. The sample size was derived using the  
12 statistical power analysis program GPower (power = 80%, significance criterion = 5%, effect  
13 size = 25%). An MTurk sample was chosen for three reasons. First, prior studies have found that  
14 MTurk samples are as representative as traditional subject pools (Paolacci *et al.*, 2010) and  
15 significantly more diverse than college student pools (Buhrmester *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore,  
16 MTurk samples have been found to be more representative in studies that require general random  
17 population sampling than more specific populations (Berinsky *et al.*, 2012). Finally, prior  
18 research on the marketing of celebrities has used an MTurk sample, and in that study the  
19 researchers compared their MTurk sample to a student sample, finding no statistical difference  
20 (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016).  
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36 Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (narrative persona type:  
37 professional or personal) in a between-subjects experimental design. To help ensure quality of  
38 data and random assignment, all subjects were paid without a qualification screening, thus  
39 removing an incentive to misrepresent themselves (Wessling *et al.*, 2017), subjects were  
40 restricted from participating in the same experiment twice, and a process cross-referencing each  
41 subject's MTurk WorkerID against an aggregate list of WorkerIDs compiled from all previous  
42 studies (Peer *et al.*, 2012) was employed to prohibit subjects who had participated in related  
43 studies. Items measuring attentiveness also were interspersed throughout the experiment.  
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3 the level of their celebrity knowledge to ensure a valid sample of celebrity brand narrative  
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5 consumers. Eight subjects were removed from the study for their lack of celebrity knowledge or  
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7 attentiveness, leaving a sample size of 108. Sample characteristics are shown in table 1.  
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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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### *Procedure*

The independent variable, persona narrative, was manipulated using stimuli intended to transport the subject into the celebrity world of Michael Fredrick. A fictional celebrity brand was used to ensure experimental condition equivalency by avoiding any biasing effects resulting from different levels of prior knowledge about or existing attitudes toward a “real” celebrity brand. Although the level in which a consumer is immersed has been found to be unaffected by whether a narrative is labeled as non-fiction or fiction (Green and Brock, 2000), high levels of realism have been found to increase consumer’s transportation (Green, 2004). Thus, to create an immersive narrative able to quickly transport the subjects into Michael Fredrick’s world, we employed a narrative arc high in realism with a classic three-act plot structure (i.e., set-up, confrontation, and resolution) (Field, 2005). Different narrative mediums were used for each act to simulate consumers piecing together a celebrity brand narrative from different sources.

The set-up for Michael Fredrick’s narrative was conveyed via a fictional online celebrity news YouTube video called “The Hollywood Minute.” The video was produced with professional actors, sets and editing to appear as realistic as possible (the professional and personal persona narrative videos can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/AlMvavJCiqs>; <https://youtu.be/I4MlyesU73A>). The confrontation was introduced using an altered online celebrity brand news article from “Entertainment Weekly.” Finally, the resolution of the

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3 narrative was tweeted by Michael Fredrick through his fictional “Twitter” account. Figures 2 and  
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6 3 provide images of the professional and personal narrative arcs used in the experiment. The  
7  
8 professional narrative manipulation focused on Michael Fredrick’s portrayal of a Civil War  
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10 soldier in a critically-acclaimed blockbuster movie, a role for which he wins a “Best Actor”  
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12 Oscar award. The personal narrative manipulation employed the same three information  
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14 platforms and three-act narrative arc, but instead conveyed a story of Michael Fredrick’s  
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16 personal life, in which he transitions from a bachelor to a husband and father.  
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21 INSERT FIGURE 2 and FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE  
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26  
27 Subjects completed a written assignment after each act, in which they were asked to type  
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29 a one or two sentence comment based on the events in the act. These writing assignments were  
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31 employed to further immerse subjects into the world of the narrative and to collect qualitative  
32  
33 data for verifying subject attentiveness and context (van Laer *et al.*, 2014). After each narrative  
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35 manipulation, a manipulation check was presented to the subjects to assess whether the subjects  
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37 perceived the narrative as either professional or personal (Perdue and Summers, 1986). The  
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39 mediating variable, relationship norm communality ( $\alpha = .876$ ), was measured on a three-item,  
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41 seven-point Likert scale (anchored at 1= strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree). The scale for  
42  
43 relationship norm communality was adapted from scales created by Clark (1986) and Mills *et al.*  
44  
45 (2004). The dependent variable, celebrity brand attachment, was measured using scales adapted  
46  
47 from Park *et al.*, (2010) and Park *et al.*, (2013). Two dimensions of celebrity brand attachment,  
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49 prominence and closeness, were measured with separate scales. Prominence ( $\alpha = .830$ ) and  
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51 closeness ( $\alpha = .960$ ), were both measured on three-item Likert scales (anchored at 1=strongly  
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3 disagree and 7=strongly agree). All scale items are reported in the Appendix.

#### 4 5 *Study 1 Results*

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8 The results of the manipulation check indicate a significant mean difference in the correct  
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10 direction ( $p < .01$ ) between the perception of the professional vs. personal narratives. A one-way  
11  
12 ANOVA tested the effect of the independent variable (professional vs. personal narrative type)  
13  
14 on the dependent variable, celebrity brand attachment. A significant difference among narrative  
15  
16 type was evident ( $F(1, 106) = 12.49, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .105$ ) with subjects in the personal  
17  
18 narrative condition ( $M = 4.16, SD = .93$ ) having higher mean attachment scores than those in the  
19  
20 professional narrative condition ( $M = 3.39, SD = 1.31$ ), supporting H1.  
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24 Preacher and Hayes' (2004) bootstrapped regression macro, INDIRECT, revealed that the  
25  
26 mean indirect effect through communal relationship norms is positive and significant ( $a \times b =$   
27  
28  $.451$ ), with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero ( $CI = .158 \text{ to } .771$ ). In the indirect path, a  
29  
30 unit increase in persona narrative type increases communal relationship norms by  $a = .707$  units  
31  
32 on a zero to one scale, and a unit increase in communal relationship norms increases attachment  
33  
34 by  $b = .637$  on a zero to one scale. The direct effect ( $c = .319$ ) is not significant ( $p = .051$ ). In the  
35  
36 direct path, holding communal relationship norms constant, a unit increase in persona narrative  
37  
38 type does not significantly increase attachment. Using Zhao *et al.*'s (2010) method of  
39  
40 determining partial and full mediation, the authors find that since the indirect effect is significant  
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42 and the direct effect is not significant, communal relationship norms fully mediates the  
43  
44 relationship between persona narrative type and attachment, thus supporting H2. A finding of  
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46 partial mediation, in contrast, would suggest the possibility of missing mediators in the model.  
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INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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## Discussion

Study 1 shows support for the hypothesized foundational mechanisms of the celebrity brand attachment process. The findings indicate that celebrity brand persona narratives elicit communal relationship norms, which subsequently drive consumer-brand attachment. This study also finds that celebrity brand marketers can directly control the impact of celebrity brand narratives on attachment by varying the type of persona narrative. More specifically, the data demonstrates that, relative to professional persona narratives, subjects exposed to personal persona narratives reported higher levels of attachment to the celebrity brand

### THE ROLE OF SOURCE OF FAME NARRATIVES

Given the power of personal persona narratives, as found in Study 1, the authors next seek to explore boundary conditions to determine what type of narratives generate the strongest levels of consumer attachment. Consumer perceptions of how a celebrity rises to fame may be one factor that influences attachment. Celebrity studies scholars classify a celebrity's source of fame into two categories: *achieved* and *attributed* (Rojek, 2001). Achieved celebrity brand narratives are *stories in which the consumer perceives that the source of the celebrity brand's fame is achieved through skill or talent* (e.g., athletic, acting, singing, modeling, etc.). Conversely, attributed celebrity brand narratives are *stories in which the consumer perceives that the source of the celebrity brand's fame is attributed to them by the news or social media* (i.e., fame despite an absence of skill or talent). For example, an attributed celebrity might be an ordinary person who is thrust into the limelight via a reality television show, viral video or a news event, such as Kim Kardashian (i.e., someone "well-known for his well-knownness" [Boorstin, 1962, p. 57]). Gradients of achieved and attributed fame likely exist, as the two may lie as opposite anchor points on a continuum. For example, a pop star with minimal singing

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3 talent may be perceived as having more attributed than achieved fame, since consumers may feel  
4 that the pop star rose to stardom as a result of being a media darling, rather than due to musical  
5 talent.  
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10 Celebrity brands that are perceived to have achieved their fame are believed to have  
11 stronger and longer-lasting star power than attributed celebrity brands who are “famous for being  
12 famous” (Gamson, 1994). Celebrity brands with attributed narratives have been derisively  
13 referred to as human pseudo-events and are often seen as inferior to celebrity brands with  
14 achieved narratives (Boorstin, 1962). However, perceptions of inferiority may not be aligned  
15 with attachment or consumption behavior. Certainly, there is growing evidence of an emergence  
16 of celebrity brands with attributed narratives in the era of social media and reality TV, despite  
17 their perceived inferiority. Studies conducted by Google (O’Neil-Hart and Blumenstein, 2016)  
18 and Variety (Ault, 2014) found that attributed celebrities such as “YouTubers” are more  
19 influential than traditional achieved celebrities due to their perceived relatability, candidness and  
20 authenticity.  
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35 These findings suggest that, when combined with a professional narrative, celebrity  
36 brands that are attributed fame may be perceived as inferior due to their lack of special talent;  
37 however, that lack of talent may also make them more relatable than celebrity brands with  
38 achieved narratives. Accordingly, achieved celebrity brands using a professional narrative should  
39 be perceived as superior because of their talent; however, their talent also likely makes them less  
40 relatable than celebrity brands with attributed narratives. In other words, for professional  
41 narratives involving attributed brands, salience should be low while relevance and  
42 meaningfulness should be high. Likewise, salience should be high while relevance and  
43 meaningfulness should be low for celebrity brands with achieved narratives. Furthermore, when  
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3 using a personal narrative, achieved celebrity brands may be perceived as having not only  
4 superior talent, but also relatability, candidness and authenticity. Salience, meaningfulness and  
5 relevance should be high and, thus, those celebrity brands should generate significantly higher  
6 attachment levels relative to celebrity brands with attributed narratives.  
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12 **H3:** Source of fame narratives moderate the relationship between persona narratives  
13 and celebrity brand attachment, such that personal persona narratives featuring  
14 achieved celebrity brand narratives produce stronger attachment levels relative to  
15 those featuring attributed celebrity brand narratives.  
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## 18 **STUDY 2**

19  
20 Study 2 empirically tests H3 and seeks to replicate the findings of H1. As with Study 1,  
21 Study 2 uses an online experiment featuring narratives about the same fictional celebrity brand,  
22 Michael Fredrick. Study 2 explores which combination of source of fame narratives with persona  
23 narratives produces the strongest levels of attachment toward Michel Fredrick. This study also  
24 measures the transportation levels of the subjects to evaluate the effectiveness of the narrative  
25 stimuli in immersing the consumer into Michael Fredrick's world.  
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### 34 *Subjects and Design*

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36 A total of 213 subjects from an online panel (MTurk) participated in the study for a  
37 payment of \$0.75 US. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2×2  
38 between-subjects experimental design manipulating persona narrative type (professional,  
39 personal) and source of fame narrative (achieved, attributed). The same protocols as those used  
40 in Study 1 were employed to help ensure quality of data, determine sample size and ensure  
41 random assignment. Because of these precautions, 10 subjects were removed from the study for  
42 lack of celebrity brand knowledge and attention, leaving a sample size of 203. Characteristics of  
43 the sample are shown in table 1.  
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### 54 *Procedure*

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3 To manipulate the source of fame narrative, subjects were exposed either to a narrative  
4 conveying that Michael Fredrick achieved his fame because of his acting ability or to a narrative  
5 that Michael Fredrick was attributed his fame because of his appearance in a reality television  
6 show, like the CBS reality program “Survivor.” Next, manipulation checks assessed whether the  
7 subjects could perceive Michael Fredrick’s narrative as either achieved or attributed. As in Study  
8 1, subjects then read a persona narrative that described either Michael Fredrick’s professional life  
9 or personal life, followed by checks assessing the persona narrative manipulations.  
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19 Like Study 1, the narratives about Michael Fredrick were presented in a three-act  
20 structure and over the same three platforms (i.e., online celebrity news video segment, online  
21 celebrity news magazine article, and the celebrity brand’s Twitter account). Once again, after  
22 exposure to each narrative platform, subjects wrote a short comment based on the events  
23 contained in the narrative. Next, subjects responded to a three-item Likert scale (anchored at  
24 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) measuring narrative transportation ( $\alpha = .725$ ) adapted  
25 from a scale from Green and Brock (2000). Finally, the dependent variable, celebrity brand  
26 attachment, was measured using the same scale as Study 1 (prominence ( $\alpha = .785$ ), closeness ( $\alpha$   
27 = .972). All scale items can be found in the Appendix.  
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#### 40 *Study 2 Results*

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42 As in Study 1, manipulation check results for the persona narrative manipulation indicated  
43 a significant mean difference in the correct direction ( $p < .001$ ) between the professional and  
44 personal manipulation. The manipulation check for the source of fame narrative manipulation  
45 also indicated significant mean differences in the intended direction ( $p < .001$ ) between achieved  
46 and attributed groups. Narrative transportation levels were found to be above the midpoint ( $M =$   
47 5.35), suggesting that the narrative stimuli produced immersion.  
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3 A 2×2 ANOVA followed by a simple effects test was performed using celebrity brand  
4 attachment as the dependent variable. Replicating the findings of H1, significant differences  
5 among persona narrative type were evident ( $F(1, 199) = 8.24, p = .005, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .04$ ). Subjects  
6 in the personal group ( $M = 3.87, SD = 1.25$ ) had higher mean attachment scores than those in the  
7 professional group ( $M = 3.37, SD = 1.28$ ). Significant differences among source of fame  
8 narrative also were evident ( $F(1, 199) = 4.28, p = .040, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .042$ ). Subjects in the  
9 achieved group ( $M = 3.79, SD = 1.36$ ) had higher mean attachment scores than those in the  
10 attributed group ( $M = 3.44, SD = 1.19$ ). As seen in figure 4, these main effects were moderated  
11 by a statistically significant interaction between persona narrative type and source of fame  
12 narrative type ( $F(1, 199) = 12.11, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .057$ ). A simple effects test did not reveal  
13 significant differences between achieved professional persona narratives and attributed  
14 professional persona narratives ( $F(1, 199) = .99, p = .321$ ). Subjects in the achieved professional  
15 persona narratives group ( $M = 3.25, SD = 1.29$ ) did not have significantly lower mean  
16 attachment scores than those in the attributed professional persona narrative group ( $M = 3.49, SD$   
17  $= 1.25$ ). The simple effects test did, however, reveal significant differences between achieved  
18 personal persona narratives and attributed personal persona narratives ( $F(1, 199) = 15.47, p <$   
19  $.001$ ). Subjects in the achieved personal group ( $M = 4.34, SD = 1.19$ ) had significantly higher  
20 mean attachment scores than those in the attributed personal group ( $M = 3.39, SD = 1.13$ ),  
21 supporting H3.  
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48 INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

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### 52 Discussion

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55 Study 2 replicated the findings from Study 1 while also demonstrating that narratives  
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3 about the celebrity brand's source of fame moderate the persona narrative → brand attachment  
4 relationship. This study finds support for the notion that despite their lack of a perceived talent,  
5 stories about reality stars can engender more attachment than those featuring achieved celebrities  
6 in some cases because of their ability to be relatable to consumers. However, celebrities with  
7 achieved narratives can be paired with personal persona narratives to reverse this effect by  
8 demonstrating their relatability to consumers, thereby producing attachment levels that stories  
9 featuring reality stars may not be able to garner.

### 19 **THE ROLE OF PERSONAL PERSONA NARRATIVE VALENCE** 20 **AND AUTHENTICITY**

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22  
23 Study 2's findings suggest that celebrity brand narratives that are perceived as both  
24 personal and achieved have a strong impact on consumer attachment. Given this power of  
25 personal achieved narratives, the authors more deeply explore the role of the personal narratives  
26 by examining the impact of their perceived valence and authenticity on attachment (figure 5) to  
27 shed more light on the age-old claim that "all publicity is good publicity." Narrative valence is  
28 defined as *the intrinsic affective quality of the narrative*. In interpersonal relationships, positively  
29 (vs. negatively) valenced behaviors serve as confirming (vs. disconfirming) evidence of  
30 perceived relationship partner quality (Boon and Holmes, 1999). Celebrity brand relationships,  
31 however, lack physical and direct interpersonal interaction. Thus, the valence of a celebrity brand  
32 narrative may not be assessed by consumers from an interpersonal perspective. For example,  
33 news with a negative valence about a celebrity brand committing a transgression could be  
34 evaluated by the consumer as out of character, rather than a breach of the relationship.  
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52 INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE  
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Multiple forms of the authenticity construct exist in academic literature. Narrative authenticity refers to the extent to which a narrative conveys the illusion of the reality of ordinary life in reference to a consumption situation (Stern, 1994). Unlike narrative authenticity, which is more “external” in nature (*i.e.*, the narrative is true to reality), brand extension authenticity focuses on more “internal” aspects of the authenticity construct such as the brand’s essence and resistance to exploitation (*i.e.*, the narrative is true to the brand itself) (Spiggle *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, celebrity brand narratives may be perceived as evidence that confirms or disconfirms the consumer’s expectations about the celebrity brand’s associations - their authenticity (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Moulard *et al.*, 2015). Further, how authentically a celebrity brand’s narrative fits with a consumer’s expectations has been found to play a large role in stimulating attachment (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016). Thus, we adapt Spiggle *et al.*’s (2012) definition of brand extension authenticity to define celebrity brand narrative authenticity as *a consumer’s sense that a brand narrative is a legitimate and consistent extension of the celebrity brand*. Celebrity brand narratives that are perceived as non-exploitative and consistent with a consumer’s associations about a celebrity brand’s persona are called *on-brand narratives* in this study, while *off-brand narratives* are those that are perceived to be exploitative and/or lacking fit with consumer associations. As seen in table 3, when celebrity brand narrative valence interacts with narrative authenticity a typology of four new types of perceived narratives emerges, adding to the literature on celebrity brand narratives: 1) tall tale narratives (on-brand, positive), 2) anti-hero narratives (off-brand, positive), 3) street cred narratives (on-brand, negative), and 4) transgression narratives (off-brand, negative).

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INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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3 In general, on-brand personal achieved narratives should enhance a celebrity brand  
4 relationship because consumers perceive them as stable and repeated confirmations of their  
5 expectations (Oliver and Winer, 1987). Further, narratives with a perceived positive valence  
6 should increase attachment relative to negative narratives (Puzakova *et al.*, 2013). A celebrity  
7 brand's public relations team often generates positively valenced on-brand narratives to try to  
8 build trust and understanding. However, despite the positive valence and consistency of brand  
9 essence of this type of publicity, attachment resulting from a "tall tale" narrative could be capped  
10 by perceptions of brand exploitation and lack of uniqueness (Moulard *et al.*, 2015). Staged  
11 narratives have been found to result in less favorable consumer perceptions than implied  
12 narratives as consumers are likely to recognize staged celebrity narratives as "trying too hard to  
13 sell" (Knoll and Matthes, 2017; Smith, 1977, p. 198).

14  
15 Thus, street cred narratives (on-brand, negative) ironically could elicit attachment levels  
16 similar to those of tall tale narratives (on-brand, positive) despite their negative valence, simply  
17 because they are perceived as on-brand with the persona's essence, unique identity, and aura  
18 (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Street cred narratives may confirm expectations of a celebrity brand's  
19 essence and are likely to be perceived by consumers as less overt in their persuasion and spin,  
20 thereby reducing perceptions of exploitation. For example, hip-hop music celebrity brands who  
21 are known for rapping about criminal activity in their songs could earn street-cred for news about  
22 them committing a crime, as it may make them more authentic to their consumers.

23  
24 Relative to on-brand personal narratives, off-brand narratives should produce lower  
25 levels of attachment due to their unstable associations and disconfirmation of celebrity brand  
26 expectations (Moulard *et al.*, 2015). Off-brand narratives that are negative in nature  
27 (transgression narratives) are likely to be very damaging to celebrity relationships (Puzakova *et*

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3 *al.*, 2013). Prior research on brands and organizations found that transgressions committed by  
4 sincere brands undermine deep relationships (Aaker *et al.*, 2004), and consumer perceptions of  
5 organizational identity incongruence result in lasting perceptions of infamy (Zavyalova *et al.*,  
6 2017). Anecdotally, attachment levels for Lori Loughlin, an actor with positive brand  
7 associations as a trustworthy family woman, appeared to suffer immensely when negative off-  
8 brand news broke about her being charged with paying \$500,000 US in bribes for her two  
9 daughters' admission into the University of Southern California. Transgression narratives are not  
10 only negative in valence, they are also inconsistent with a celebrity brand's essence, which may  
11 generate feelings of disgust and betrayal. Compounding this effect, transgression narratives are  
12 high in external authenticity, as consumers are likely to believe these stories are true.  
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26 For positive off-brand (anti-hero) narratives, their lack of internal consistency with the  
27 celebrity's brand may cause consumers to suspect the celebrity's brand actions are profit-driven.  
28 For example, a story about a conceited celebrity brand giving to charity could provoke consumer  
29 suspicions of brand exploitation. If brand essence is high, then the story may be perceived as a  
30 unique anti-hero narrative and attachment levels will be enhanced. Conversely, if brand  
31 exploitation is high, then the narrative could be perceived as spin and attachment is lowered.  
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40 **H4:** For achieved personal narratives, narrative authenticity type influences celebrity  
41 brand attachment such that on-brand narratives (tall tale narratives/street cred  
42 narratives) produce stronger attachment relative to off-brand narratives (anti-hero  
43 narratives/transgression narratives).  
44

45 **H5:** The valence of an achieved personal narrative moderates the relationship between  
46 its authenticity and celebrity brand attachment such that positive off-brand  
47 narratives (anti-hero narratives) produce stronger attachment levels relative to  
48 negative off-brand narratives (transgression narratives)  
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### 51 **STUDY 3**

52 Study 3 empirically tests H4 and H5 using an online experiment featuring achieved  
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3 personal narratives about fictional celebrity brand Michael Fredrick. Given the findings from  
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5 Study 2 that achieved personal narratives lead to celebrity brand attachment, Study 3 isolates  
6  
7 achieved personal narratives and explores them at a deeper level by testing the hypothesized  
8  
9 interaction effect between achieved personal narrative authenticity and valence on attachment.  
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### 12 *Subjects and Design*

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14 A total of 206 subjects from an online panel (MTurk) participated in the study for a  
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16 payment of \$1 US. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2×2 between-  
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18 subjects experimental design manipulating narrative valence (positive, negative) and narrative  
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20 authenticity (on-brand, off-brand). Similar protocols used in Studies 1 and 2 to help ensure  
21  
22 quality of data and random assignment were employed. Because of these precautions, 16 subjects  
23  
24 were removed from the study for their lack of celebrity awareness and attention, leaving a  
25  
26 sample size of 190. Characteristics of the sample are reported in table 1.  
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### 30 *Procedure*

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33 After reading a short scenario and fictional GQ magazine article establishing Michael  
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35 Fredrick's personal persona as a talented celebrity actor who is a consummate bachelor who  
36  
37 routinely frequents night clubs with famous supermodels, subjects were randomly and evenly  
38  
39 assigned to one of four treatment conditions. Subjects were exposed either to a perceived on-  
40  
41 brand narrative conveying that Michael Fredrick was spotted partying with a supermodel at a  
42  
43 trendy night club on New Year's Eve or to a perceived off-brand narrative of Michael Fredrick  
44  
45 spending time with his grandmother at her retirement home on New Year's Eve. Once again,  
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47 after exposure to each narrative platform, subjects were asked to write a short comment based on  
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49 the events contained in the narrative to increase their immersion.  
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54 Manipulation checks assessed whether the subjects could perceive Michael Fredrick's  
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narrative as either on-brand or off-brand. Items used in the manipulation check were based on a brand extension authenticity scale created by Spiggle *et al.* (2012). The scale ( $\alpha = .861$ ) was anchored at 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. Next, perceived narrative valence was manipulated using first a fictional TMZ celebrity news tweet and then a “Hollywood Minute” celebrity news video. Positive valence narratives conveyed Michael Fredrick having a joyful time on New Year’s Eve with either his grandmother or a supermodel, while narratives with a negative valence displayed Michael Fredrick getting in a heated argument on New Year’s Eve with either his grandmother or a supermodel. A manipulation check of narrative valence was conducted using a Likert scale (anchored at 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) based on the circumplex model of affect (positive  $\alpha = .962$ ; negative  $\alpha = .972$ ) (Russell, 1980). The dependent variable, celebrity brand attachment, was measured using the same scale as in Studies 1 and 2 (prominence ( $\alpha = .801$ ), closeness ( $\alpha = .973$ ) and demographic variables were collected. All scale items are found in the Appendix.

### *Study 3 Results*

Manipulation check results for narrative authenticity indicated a significant mean difference in the correct direction ( $p = .012$ ) between on-brand and off-brand narrative groups. Manipulation checks for narrative valence also indicated a significant mean difference in the intended direction ( $p < .001$ ) between positive and negative narrative groups. A 2x2 ANOVA test followed by a simple effects test were performed using celebrity brand attachment as the dependent variable. Significant differences among narrative authenticity were evident ( $F(1, 186) = 4.04, p = .046, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .021$ ). Subjects in the on-brand group ( $M = 3.59, SD = 1.28$ ) had higher mean attachment scores than those in the off-brand group ( $M = 3.25, SD = 1.04$ ), thus supporting H4.

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3 Furthermore, as seen in figure 6, this main effect was not significantly moderated by a  
4  
5 interaction between narrative authenticity and narrative valence ( $F(1, 186) = 1.112, p = .293,$   
6  
7 partial  $\eta^2 = .006$ ), thus H5 was not supported. A simple effects test did not reveal significant  
8  
9 differences between on-brand narratives with a positive valence and those with a negative  
10  
11 valence ( $F(1, 186) = .45, p = .505$ ). Subjects in the positive on-brand group ( $M = 3.55, SD = 1.25$ )  
12  
13 did not show significantly different attachment scores than the negative on-brand group ( $M =$   
14  
15  $3.63, SD = 1.33$ ). The simple effects test did, however, reveal significant differences between off-  
16  
17 brand narratives with positive versus negative valence ( $F(1, 186) = 4.79, p = .030$ ). Subjects in  
18  
19 the positive off-brand group ( $M = 3.39, SD = 1.02$ ) had significantly higher mean attachment  
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21 scores than those in the negative off-brand group ( $M = 3.11, SD = 1.04$ ).  
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### 32 *Discussion*

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34 Study 3 demonstrates that although on-brand narratives elicit higher levels of attachment  
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36 than off-brand narratives, narrative valence does not moderate the relationship between narrative  
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38 authenticity and celebrity brand attachment. Although there is no support for a moderating  
39  
40 impact, there is evidence indicating that narratives which are perceived as negative and on-brand  
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42 do not significantly differ from those perceived as positive and on-brand in terms of generating  
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44 attachment. In fact, of the four groups, the highest levels of attachment are found for subjects in  
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46 the street cred narrative group, which suggests that consumers may see negative on-brand  
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48 narratives as having less spin and thus being more authentic than positive on-brand tall tale  
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50 narratives. The results of Study 3 also find significant negative differences in attachment with  
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52 narratives that are perceived as off-brand with a celebrity brand's associations. Transgression  
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narratives appear to cause great harm to celebrity brands, since off-brand negative narratives elicit significantly lower levels of attachment than off-brand positive (anti-hero) narratives. Still, while anti-hero narratives are significantly higher in terms of generating attachment than transgression narratives, they did not produce high levels of attachment, as potential perceptions of brand exploitation may mitigate their ability to do so.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite the significant role that celebrity brands play in marketing, business, and society at large, the fundamental process of how strong consumer-celebrity brand relationships develop is not well understood. Thus, developing an understanding of how and when consumers create attachment towards celebrity brands is a critical task for practitioners who work with celebrity brands. The current research contributes to the marketing field by providing conceptual and empirical support for a unique process in which celebrity brand attachment develops, in large part, from persona narratives, especially personal persona narratives. Over the course of three studies, our research demonstrates that celebrity brand narratives transport a consumer to a world where he/she follows communal relationship norms and develops attachment as if he/she were in an interpersonal relationship with the celebrity brand. Study 1 also finds that persona narratives which are perceived as personal are especially effective at generating high levels of attachment compared to professional persona narratives. Moreover, Study 2 demonstrates that personal persona narratives are critical for celebrity who are known for having achieved their fame, relative to those who are attributed their fame, since brand attachment is markedly stronger when persona narratives are perceived to convey information about celebrities' personal lives. Finally, in Study 3 the researchers find that personal persona narratives for achieved celebrity brands produce strong attachment levels when they are perceived as on-brand with consumer

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3 expectations, even in instances where on-brand narratives are negative in nature. Based on these  
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5 findings, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed followed by limitations and  
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7 directions for future research.  
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### 10 *Theoretical Implications*

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12 This research makes five primary theoretical contributions. First, we extend the celebrity  
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14 brand literature by specifying the celebrity brand construct's conceptual domain and its unique  
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16 properties. We identify the three fundamental properties that comprise a celebrity's brand: 1) a  
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18 veridical (i.e. true) identity, 2) a professional persona, and 3) a personal persona. These personas  
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20 are conveyed through narratives to consumers, who perceive and reconstruct them, thereby  
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22 building associations, relationship norms and attachment to the celebrity brand.  
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26 Second, our research contributes to the brand relationship theory literature by clarifying  
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28 the interplay between celebrity brand relationships and interpersonal relationships. Celebrity  
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30 brand narratives transport consumers to a "fictional world" where they are cognitively aware  
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32 they are not engaged in an actual interpersonal relationship with a celebrity, but they still follow  
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34 the behavioral norms of an interpersonal relationship and develop emotional interpersonal  
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36 relationship-like attachments with their target celebrities. In other words, this research finds  
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38 support for the notion that interpersonal relationships inform and teach consumers' norms of  
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40 behavior and emotions for their celebrity brand relationships. Thus, interpersonal relationships  
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42 are not perceived as equivalent, analogous, or metaphorical to celebrity brand relationships, but  
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44 are rather allegorical to them.  
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49 Third, we extend the parasocial relationship literature by further identifying the  
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51 fundamental drivers of the illusion of intimacy (Giles, 2002). Parasocial relationships are  
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53 perceived interpersonal relationships with a mass media persona that deepen over time with  
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3 repeated viewings (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Additional drivers of parasocial relationships  
4  
5 include loneliness and companionship (McQuail *et al.*, 1972), perceived realism and attraction  
6  
7 (Rubin and Perse, 1987), and homophily (i.e., the tendency for individuals to bond with others  
8  
9 who are similar) (Turner, 1993). The authors now add perceived persona, source of fame,  
10  
11 valence and authenticity narratives as factors impacting parasocial relationships.  
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14  
15 Fourth, we contribute to the celebrity endorsement literature by positioning narratives as  
16  
17 an essential means through which the celebrity brand establishes itself as a credible source in the  
18  
19 consumer's mind (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Credibility is largely constructed by the quality of  
20  
21 the narrative conveyed by the celebrity brand and societal institutions and how that narrative is  
22  
23 perceived by the consumer (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Further, trustworthiness and expertise, the  
24  
25 primary dimensions of source credibility, can now be viewed through the lens of celebrity brand  
26  
27 narratives (Erdogan, 1999). The matchup hypothesis suggests that the celebrity endorser should  
28  
29 be trustworthy or an expert in the product area for the endorsement to be effective (Kamins and  
30  
31 Gupta, 1994). However, this research finds support for instances when the celebrity brand is not  
32  
33 perceived as an expert (i.e., attributed narratives) or personally trustworthy (i.e., negatively  
34  
35 valenced narratives) yet still can create attachment.  
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40 Finally, we add to narrative transportation theory by connecting it to the brand  
41  
42 relationship literature. Relationship norms are demonstrated as the mechanism that allows  
43  
44 consumers to exhibit interpersonal relationship-like behaviors that result from narrative  
45  
46 transportation. Furthermore, attachment is specifically conceptualized and empirically  
47  
48 demonstrated to be a consequence of narrative transportation through a process of storyteller  
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50 narratives and story receiver narratives creating self/brand connections.  
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54 *Managerial Implications*  
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3 Practitioners who work for celebrity brands (e.g., publicists, talent agents) and seek to  
4 build stronger relationships with consumers should pay close attention to the narratives that are  
5 developed and conveyed to the public. Practitioners should aim to immerse consumers by  
6 crafting narratives that feature imaginable events, causal and chronological in nature, and  
7 consistent across all narrative platforms, since contradictions in the narrative would likely break  
8 immersion. Narratives should also make the celebrity brand identifiable and empathic with  
9 personal narratives featuring the celebrity brand's personal life. It is especially imperative for  
10 managers of celebrity brands who are perceived to have achieved their fame to supplement  
11 stories of their talent with humanizing personal narratives. Conversely, managers of celebrity  
12 brands who are perceived to have been attributed their fame by the media and are known mostly  
13 for their personal lives should develop narratives that suggest legitimate talent (e.g., taking on  
14 roles in independent films, writing his/her own lyrics).

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16  
17 The authenticity of a celebrity brand's narrative also plays a vital role in developing  
18 strong consumer relationships, as narratives should be formed to stay on-brand with the celebrity  
19 brand's identity. In fact, even negative narratives can build relationships so long as the narratives  
20 are on-brand. Thus, all publicity is good publicity for a celebrity brand, except for transgressions  
21 that are off-brand with consumer expectations and thus perceived as inauthentic.

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23  
24 Professionals working with celebrity brands (e.g., firms hiring celebrity brands as  
25 endorsers, film studios, professional sports leagues) should carefully assess the potential impact  
26 of the celebrity brand's narratives on their organization and their strategies. For example, film  
27 studios evaluate a leading actor's official social media presence when deciding whether to green  
28 light a film, casting the actor and developing the film's marketing campaign strategy (Busch,  
29 2014). Similarly, brand managers should weigh the impact of a celebrity brand's narrative on

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3 their product brand when developing an endorsement agreement. This research supports prior  
4 research (Aaker *et al.*, 2004) that finds that celebrity brands embroiled in transgressions deeply  
5 harm the reputations of the brands they endorse. Furthermore, firms should consider developing  
6 narrative messages (e.g., tall tale, anti-hero, street-cred, etc.) with celebrity brands rather than  
7 endorsement messages because narrative processing is thought to create more lasting attitude and  
8 belief changes than analytical processing. Narratives have been found to be more entertaining  
9 and less overt in their commercial intentions than advocacy messages such as endorsements  
10 (Appel and Richter, 2007).  
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22 This research aims to explain the general process by which consumers develop  
23 relationships with celebrity brands, however, more research is needed to add depth to the model.  
24 Other forms and combinations of narratives exist beyond those examined in this research project.  
25 For example, media stories often convey multiple narratives types concurrently, so a future  
26 research project could investigate the optimal ratio of professional to personal or achieved to  
27 attributed narratives needed to produce high levels of attachment. Another future study could  
28 examine the impact of a celebrity brand as being perceived as inauthentic to the extent that its  
29 professional and personal personas are not congruent. Additional research could investigate  
30 individual consumer differences that might moderate the effect of narratives on attachment.  
31 Examples of this stream of research could involve an investigation of the effect of consumer  
32 attachment style - such as a consumer's level of security or insecurity in their interpersonal  
33 relationships (Bowlby, 1958), the impact of differences in a consumer's cultural values on the  
34 interpretation of celebrity brand narratives and the formation of celebrity brand relationships  
35 (Hofstede, 1990), and the role of celebrity brands in the construction of a consumer's actual and  
36 ideal social identities (Reed, 2004). Finally, attachment was the sole dependent variable explored  
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3 in this research, thus the impact of narratives on other outcome variables such as purchase  
4 behavior, the power of the celebrity as an endorser, and celebrity worship and stalking could be  
5 interesting. From a methodological standpoint, the three studies in this project attempted to build  
6 a relationship between subjects and an unknown fictional celebrity brand in one sitting.  
7  
8 Consumers in the real world, however, typically develop attachment to a celebrity brand over the  
9 course of more time and more exposures. Although an increase in time and exposure is not  
10 necessary to develop attachment to celebrity brands, it likely would strengthen attachment. Thus,  
11 attachment levels presented in these three studies were probably weaker in comparison to  
12 celebrity brand attachment levels in the real world. A longitudinal investigation could provide  
13 interesting additional insights about the interaction of narrative types and how they cultivate or  
14 deteriorate attachment over time.  
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42 [brands/#25d9e60a7919](https://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahweinswig/2016/10/05/influencers-are-the-new-brands/#25d9e60a7919) (accessed 22 December 2018).  
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**FIGURE 1**  
**PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL**  
**CELEBRITY BRAND ATTACHMENT PROCESS**

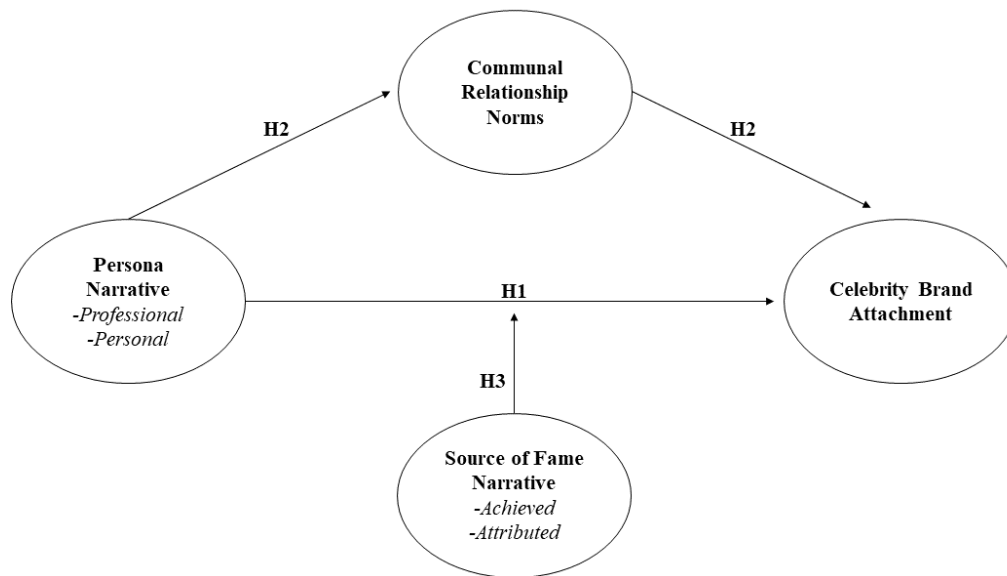
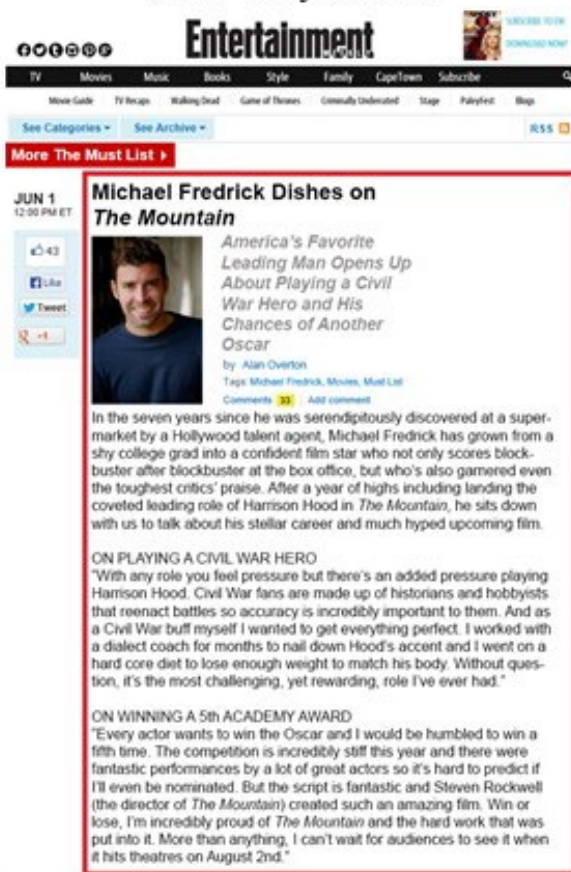


FIGURE 2  
EXAMPLE IMAGES FROM PROFESSIONAL PERSONA NARRATIVE STORY ARC

*Act 1 – Set-Up*



*Act 2 – Confrontation*

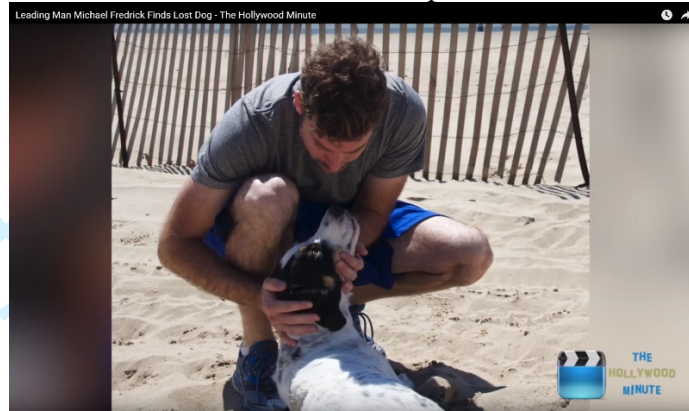


*Act 3 – Resolution*



**FIGURE 3**  
**EXAMPLE IMAGES FROM PERSONAL PERSONA NARRATIVE STORY ARC**

*Act 1 – Set Up*



*Act 2 – Confrontation*

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**JUN 1**  
12:00 PM ET

**Michael Fredrick: I Count My Blessings**

America's Favorite Leading Man Opens Up About His Upbringing, Love, and Family

by Alan Overton  
 Tags: Michael Fredrick, Movies, Must List  
 Comments 33 | Add comment

In the seven years since he was serendipitously discovered at a super-market by a Hollywood talent agent, Michael Fredrick has grown from a shy college grad into a confident film star who not only scores blockbuster after blockbuster, but who's won big at love as well. After a year of highs including adopting an adorable lost dog and a charming wedding, he gives thanks for the many joys in his life, a list topped by-no surprise-his wife.

**MY UPBRINGING** "I always seek my parents' approval on things because I respect them so much," he says. "They were both very poor growing up, and seeing them work hard and save their money, I learned from their actions. People think that because I'm a celebrity I have expensive tastes but I still wear old jeans and t-shirts and hardly ever buy expensive designer clothes. When there's leftover food at events, I hate seeing it go to waste. I'll ask, 'Can people take some home or can it go to a shelter?'"

**MY FAMILY**  
 "After being a bachelor for so long, I never thought I'd ever get married. But things changed literally the day my dog Emmy ran into my life. Before I adopted her, Emmy was a stray dog that I brought to Lighthouse Animal Shelter. Jean worked at the shelter and it was love at first sight. We got married a year later. We're working on a baby, but right now Emmy gets most of our attention. When we went on our honeymoon, we missed Emmy like crazy. I had my sister text message us pictures of him. Next time we go on vacation, Emmy's coming with us!"

*Act 3 – Resolution*

Michael Fredrick  
 @michaelfredrick  
 World champion parallel parker.  
 Everywhere

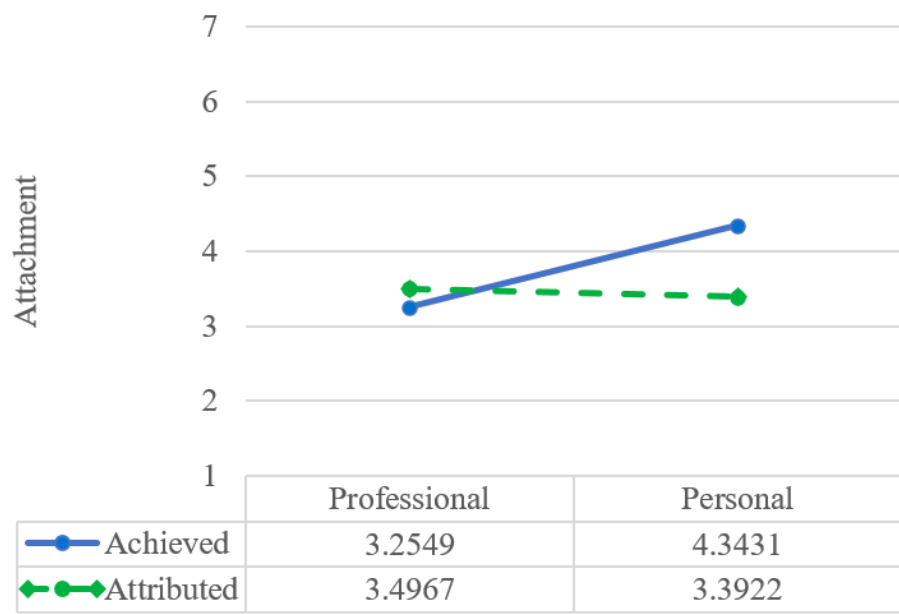
1,781 TWEETS 248 FOLLOWING 2,909,437 FOLLOWERS

**Tweets**

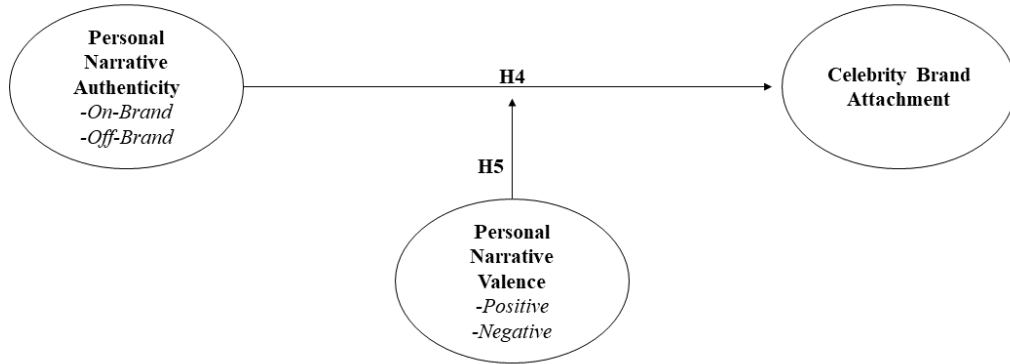
Michael Fredrick @michaelfredrick 2 Aug  
 I want you all to hear it from me first...Jean and I are expecting our first baby! #bunintheoven pic.twitter.com/KG785v8

Michael Fredrick @michaelfredrick 1 Aug  
 A king sized doggy bed wouldn't be big enough for her. #emmybein'emmy pic.twitter.com/CC75h4

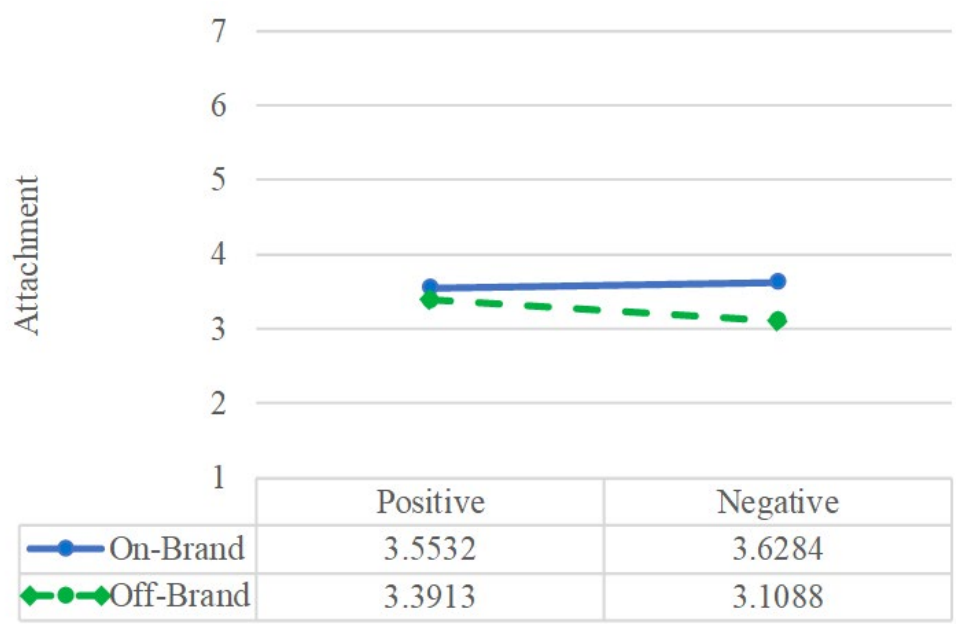
**FIGURE 4**  
**PERSONA NARRATIVE VERSUS SOURCE OF FAME NARRATIVE ON**  
**ATTACHMENT CELL MEANS PLOT**



**FIGURE 5**  
**PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL**  
**NARRATIVE AUTHENTICITY AND NARRATIVE VALENCE ON ATTACHMENT**



**FIGURE 6**  
**NARRATIVE AUTHENTICITY VERSUS NARRATIVE VALENCE ON ATTACHMENT CELL MEANS PLOT**



**TABLE 1**  
**STUDIES 1, 2, and 3: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

| <b>Characteristic</b>                        | <b>% of Study 1<br/>(N = 108)</b> | <b>% of Study 2<br/>(N = 203)</b> | <b>% of Study 3<br/>(N = 190)</b> |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                                |                                   |                                   |                                   |
| <i>Female</i>                                | 49.1% (n = 53)                    | 44.8% (n = 91)                    | 42.6% (n = 81)                    |
| <i>Male</i>                                  | 50.9% (n = 55)                    | 55.2% (n = 112)                   | 57.4% (n = 109)                   |
| <b>Age</b>                                   |                                   |                                   |                                   |
| 18-24  | 18.5% (n = 20)                    | 16.3% (n = 33)                    | 14.2% (n = 27)                    |
| 25-34  | 41.7% (n = 45)                    | 45.8% (n = 93)                    | 50.5% (n = 96)                    |
| 35-44  | 25% (n = 27)                      | 20.2% (n = 41)                    | 22.1% (n = 42)                    |
| 45-54  | 8.3% (n = 9)                      | 9.9% (n = 20)                     | 7.4% (n = 14)                     |
| 55-64  | 6.5% (n = 7)                      | 6.9% (n = 14)                     | 4.7% (n = 9)                      |
| 65+  | 0                                 | 1% (n = 2)                        | 1.1% (n = 2)                      |
| <b>Race</b>                                  |                                   |                                   |                                   |
| <i>American Indian/Alaska Native</i>         | .9% (n = 1)                       | 1.5% (n = 3)                      | .5% (n = 1)                       |
| <i>Asian</i>                                 | 9.3% (n = 10)                     | 11.3% (n = 23)                    | 7.4% (n = 14)                     |
| <i>Black/African American</i>                | 7.4% (n = 8)                      | 6.4% (n = 13)                     | 8.9% (n = 17)                     |
| <i>Hispanic/Latino</i>                       | .9% (n = 1)                       | 5.4% (n = 11)                     | 9.5% (n = 18)                     |
| <i>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</i>      | .9% (n = 1)                       | .5% (n = 1)                       | .5% (n = 1)                       |
| <i>White</i>                                 | 80.6% (n = 87)                    | 73.9% (n = 150)                   | 72.1% (n = 137)                   |
| <i>Other</i>                                 | 0                                 | 1% (n = 2)                        | 1% (n = 2)                        |
| <b>Education</b>                             |                                   |                                   |                                   |
| <i>Elementary</i>                            | 0                                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
| <i>Junior High</i>                           | 0                                 | 1% (n = 2)                        | 0                                 |
| <i>High School</i>                           | 8.3% (n = 9)                      | 6.9% (n = 14)                     | 14.7% (n = 28)                    |
| <i>Some College</i>                          | 25.9% (n = 28)                    | 28.1% (n = 57)                    | 23.7% (n = 45)                    |
| <i>Associate's Degree</i>                    | 11.1% (n = 12)                    | 8.9% (n = 18)                     | 11.1% (n = 21)                    |
| <i>Bachelor's Degree</i>                     | 41.7% (n = 45)                    | 43.3% (n = 88)                    | 40.5% (n = 77)                    |
| <i>Master's Degree</i>                       | 12% (n = 13)                      | 8.9% (n = 18)                     | 7.9% (n = 15)                     |
| <i>Doctoral or Other Professional Degree</i> | .9% (n = 1)                       | 2.5% (n = 5)                      | 2.1% (n = 4)                      |
| <b>Relationship Status</b>                   |                                   |                                   |                                   |
| <i>Single</i>                                | 31.5% (n = 34)                    | 29.6% (n = 60)                    | 41.1% (n = 78)                    |
| <i>In a Relationship</i>                     | 22.2% (n = 24)                    | 25.6% (n = 52)                    | 23.2% (n = 44)                    |
| <i>Married</i>                               | 42.6% (n = 46)                    | 38.9% (n = 79)                    | 32.1% (n = 61)                    |
| <i>Widowed</i>                               | .9% (n = 1)                       | .5% (n = 1)                       | 0                                 |
| <i>Divorced</i>                              | 2.8% (n = 3)                      | 4.9% (n = 10)                     | 3.7% (n = 7)                      |



**TABLE 2**  
**MEDIATION ANALYSES RESULTS**

| <b>Indirect Path</b>                    |  | <b>Coefficient</b> | <b>LLCI</b> | <b>ULCI</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>Significance</b> |
|---|--|--------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|---------------------|
| Narrative → Communal Norms → Attachment |  | .4506              | .1587       | .7708       | -        | Significant         |
| Narrative → Communal Norms              |  | .7070              | -           | -           | -        | -                   |
| Communal Norms → Attachment             |  | .6373              | -           | -           | -        | -                   |
| <b>Direct Path</b>                      |  | <b>Coefficient</b> | <b>LLCI</b> | <b>ULCI</b> | <b>p</b> | <b>Significance</b> |
| Narrative → Attachment                  |  | .3194              | -           | -           | .0508    | Not Significant     |

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**TABLE 3**  
**ACHIEVED PERSONAL NARRATIVE TYPES**

|                  | <i>Positive Valence</i>         | <i>Negative Valence</i>             |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>On-Brand</i>  | <b>TALL TALE<br/>NARRATIVES</b> | <b>STREET CRED<br/>NARRATIVES</b>   |
| <i>Off-Brand</i> | <b>ANTI-HERO<br/>NARRATIVES</b> | <b>TRANSGRESSION<br/>NARRATIVES</b> |

## APPENDIX A

## Items and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Loadings

| Constructs (Scale Sources)   | Items  | Study 1 | Study 1 $\alpha$ | Study 2 | Study 2 $\alpha$ | Study 3 | Study 3 $\alpha$ |
|--|--|---------|------------------|---------|------------------|---------|------------------|
| <b>Persona narrative manipulation check</b>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <i>Professional Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | The information about [the celebrity brand] describes what he is like "at work."   | 0.74    | 0.82             |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | The information about [the celebrity brand] tells a story about his professional life.   | 0.76    |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | The information about [the celebrity brand] describes events that occurred in his career.  | 0.71    |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <i>Personal Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | The information about [the celebrity brand] describes what he is like "outside of work." (r)   | 0.88    | 0.91             |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | The information about [the celebrity brand] tells a story about his personal life. (r)   | 0.88    |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | The information about [the celebrity brand] describes events that occurred outside of his career. (r)                                | 0.81    |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <b>Source of fame narrative manipulation check</b>                                     |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <i>Achieved Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | [The celebrity brand's] celebrity stems primarily from achievements or accomplishments.  |         |                  |         | 0.93             | 0.95    |                  |
|  | [The celebrity brand's] is famous because of an apparent talent or skill.  |         |                  |         | 0.92             |         |                  |
|  | Very few people can do what [the celebrity brand] can do.  |         |                  |         | 0.89             |         |                  |
| <i>Attributed Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | [The celebrity brand's] celebrity stems primarily from media attention. (r)  |         |                  |         | 0.83             | 0.92    |                  |
|  | [The celebrity brand] is "famous for being famous" and not because of an apparent talent or skill. (r)                               |         |                  |         | 0.93             |         |                  |
|  | Many people can do what [the celebrity brand] does. (r)  |         |                  |         | 0.87             |         |                  |
| <b>Narrative transportation</b> (Adapted from Green and Brock 2000)                    |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | I could easily picture the events featuring [the celebrity brand] taking place.  |         |                  |         | 0.65             | 0.73    |                  |
|  | I could picture myself in the scene of events featuring [the celebrity brand].   |         |                  |         | 0.66             |         |                  |
|  | I was mentally involved in the event featuring [the celebrity brand].  |         |                  |         | 0.66             |         |                  |
| <b>Narrative authenticity manipulation check</b> (Adapted from Spiggle et al. 2012)    |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] seems to embody the essence of who he is.  |         |                  |         |                  | 0.87    | 0.57             |
|  | The key associations I have about [the celebrity brand] are contained in this news about him.  |         |                  |         |                  | 0.88    |                  |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] gives me the feeling that he isn't the type of celebrity that tries to profit off of his fame. |         |                  |         |                  | 0.87    |                  |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] gives me the feeling that he is more interested in being true to himself than commercial gain. |         |                  |         |                  | 0.87    |                  |
| <b>Narrative valence manipulation check</b> (Adapted from Russell 1980)                |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <i>Positive Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] is pleasant.   |         |                  |         |                  | 0.97    | 0.93             |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] is appealing.  |         |                  |         |                  | 0.97    |                  |
| <i>Negative Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] is unpleasant.   |         |                  |         |                  | 0.96    | 0.95             |
|  | This news about [the celebrity brand] is off-putting.  |         |                  |         |                  | 0.96    |                  |
| <b>Communal Relationship Norms</b> (Adapted from Clark 1986 and Mills et al. 2004)     |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | I would be willing to travel far to visit [the celebrity brand].   | 0.81    | 0.88             |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | I would give up a lot to meet [the celebrity brand].   | 0.83    |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | I would go out of my way to do something that helped [the celebrity brand].  | 0.82    |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <b>Celebrity brand attachment</b> (Adapted from Park et al. 2010 and Park et al. 2013) |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
| <i>Prominence Dimension</i>  |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | My thoughts and feelings toward [the celebrity brand] are often automatic, coming to my mind seemingly on their own.                 | 0.92    | 0.83             |         | 0.79             | 0.87    | 0.80             |
|  | My thoughts and feelings toward [the celebrity brand] come to my mind naturally and instantly.                                       | 0.89    |                  | 0.87    |                  | 0.86    |                  |
|  | I have many thoughts about [the celebrity brand].  | 0.58    |                  | 0.49    |                  | 0.45    |                  |
| <i>Closeness Dimension</i>   |  |         |                  |         |                  |         |                  |
|  | I feel connected to [the celebrity brand].   | 0.94    | 0.96             |         | 0.97             | 0.94    | 0.97             |
|  | I feel a bond with [the celebrity brand].  | 0.94    |                  | 0.92    |                  | 0.96    |                  |
|  | I feel close to [the celebrity brand].   | 0.94    |                  | 0.99    |                  | 0.96    |                  |
|  | I feel close to [the celebrity brand].   | 0.94    |                  | 0.98    |                  | 0.95    |                  |

Notes: All items were measured using seven-point scales anchored by 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" unless otherwise stated.