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## ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC FIGURES IN THE PROCESS OF CONSUMERS DECISION MAKING AND BRAND PROMOTION

**A b s t r a c t:** The article presents what the celebrity endorsement is, how it is used and shows the possibilities of its use in brand promotion and influencing consumer decisions as well. As the research method, a quantitative study was selected, carried out in a group of consumers. The key conclusions suggest that the presence of public figures in brand promotion will attract the attention of consumers and make their product stand out from the competition.

**K e y w o r d s:** public figure, celebrity endorsement, consumer decisions, brand promotion

**J E L C o d e:** M 31, M 37

### INTRODUCTION

Currently, the use of the public figures image in promotional activities is present on a massive scale. Singers, famous athletes, movie stars - everyone lends their image to promote products and services. Public figures are good partners for advertising cooperation with brands because they meet two conditions that private individuals usually do not have, and these are extremely important aspects from the point of view of persuasion: they are widely liked and part of the elite [Kwarciak, 1999, p. 107].

Public figures are very attractive to recipients because they identify with them. People look for similarities in famous characters, which in turn gives a sense of familiarity. For society, this is a sign that the celebrity is also a “mere mortal” and uses the same products as individuals. The product signed with the name of the star is, in turn, much more noticeable and translates into

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increased sales. The product recommended by a celebrity becomes permanently associated with it in the minds of people [Starzyńska, 2016, p. 257].

## 1. THE CONCEPT AND TYPES OF PUBLIC PERSON

According to D. Boorstin, “a celebrity is a person who is known for being known. Anyone who has a positive opinion and is recognized in broad cultural circles can be considered a celebrity and lend their image in advertising campaigns, become the personage of a large event” [Niczewski, 2010, p. 19].

Celebrity is a product of industry. It is a person about whom a lot of people look up for information, read, watch on TV, buy recordings and discuss his or her life among friends and strangers, e.g. from the Internet [Godzic, 2007, pp. 44–47]. Celebrities are mainly athletes, actors, singers and TV presenters.

In order for a public figure to maintain his status and recognition, it is necessary to be on the stage frequently and participate in the media. Also, an audience that is interested in these people’s activities is needed. A celebrity is characterized by [Mylek, 2015, p. 79]:

- recognition of the audience;
- identity created for recipients;
- fame, attention and publicity through:
  - a) media-induced interest in the life of the star through e.g. interviews and tabloid articles;
  - b) for professionally performed profession and related awards, e.g. actor receiving a statuette at the ceremonial awarding or premiere of a new film;
  - c) for advertising, i.e. promotional activities undertaken by a public figure in cooperation with brands.

By knowing who the celebrities are, it is possible to classify them. According to H. Vejlgard, six levels of celebrity status can be distinguished. The higher the person is in the hierarchy, the greater the ability to influence recipients and trends [Vejlgard, 2008, p. 48]:

1. Icon – a person who has the characteristics of Megastar, and in addition, thanks to his ideas and value system has had a great impact on humanity. It is often worshiped for decades<sup>1</sup>;
2. Megastar – a person who contains Superstar features, but is also known globally by most people, e.g. Michael Jackson<sup>2</sup>;
3. Superstar – a very famous person, usually a singer, actor, sportsman etc. Such a person is known not only to fans of, for example, a specific sport or type of music<sup>3</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> more information at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-makes-icon-its-more-than-just-talent-stephane-de-roussan> [26.06.2020]

<sup>2</sup> more information at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/megastar> [26.06.2020]

<sup>3</sup> more information at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/superstar> [26.06.2020]

4. Star – a famous, respected and successful person, usually a singer, actor, sportsman etc.<sup>4</sup>;
5. Minor celebrity – known, meaningless figure in the celebrity industry<sup>5</sup>;
6. Wannabe – a person who tries to become famous, but usually unsuccessfully. Such person's fame usually passes quickly and is forgotten in less than "15 minutes"<sup>6</sup>.

Celebrities can be local or global. They can achieve their position as public figures in four ways [Godzic, 2007, pp. 49–50]:

1. by kinship – it is about the status of belonging (ascribed). Many celebrities were born and raised in well-known families, e.g. royal, aristocratic. An example of such a person is Miley Cyrus, daughter of Billy Ray Cyrus, a popular country singer;
2. thanks to hard work, talent or beauty – then it is about achieved status. An example of such a person is Michael Jordan;
3. thanks to media attention – then it is about the attributed celebrity phenomenon. They are simply known for being known. An example of such a person is Kim Kardashian;
4. the category called celestoids is a special type of the third type. It differs in that it is condensed and compressed. The speed at which the phenomenon arises and falls and its expressiveness seem to be the main features. An example of such a person is Monika Lewinsky.

Knowing the definition of celebrities, their hierarchy and characteristics, one can take a closer look at the advertising activities they undertake and assess their impact on the development of enterprises, which will be presented in the next section.

## 2. CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

Public figures are often invited to advertise products of various brands. This has become an integral part of modern marketing. This phenomenon is very common especially nowadays. A properly selected public figure can help an enterprise achieve its goals and draw consumers' attention to the products or services it offers. A celebrity lending his image should influence people, be widely recognized and, above all, match the product and brand character [Kotler, 1994, p. 583]. It is worth mentioning that referring to the halo effect, the attractiveness of a public person usually shifts to the product or service advertised [Wiśniewska, Liczmańska, 2011; Myłek, 2015, p. 75].

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<sup>4</sup> more information at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/star> [26.06.2020]

<sup>5</sup> more information at [https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/minor\\_celebrity](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/minor_celebrity) [26.06.2020]

<sup>6</sup> more information at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wannabe> [26.06.2020]

A public figure who supports the brand’s activities with his image is a celebrity endorser. This group of people includes not only actors, athletes or musicians, but also some animated characters, such as Winnie the Pooh or Mickey Mouse, as well as dead people [Awdziej, 2002, p. 2].

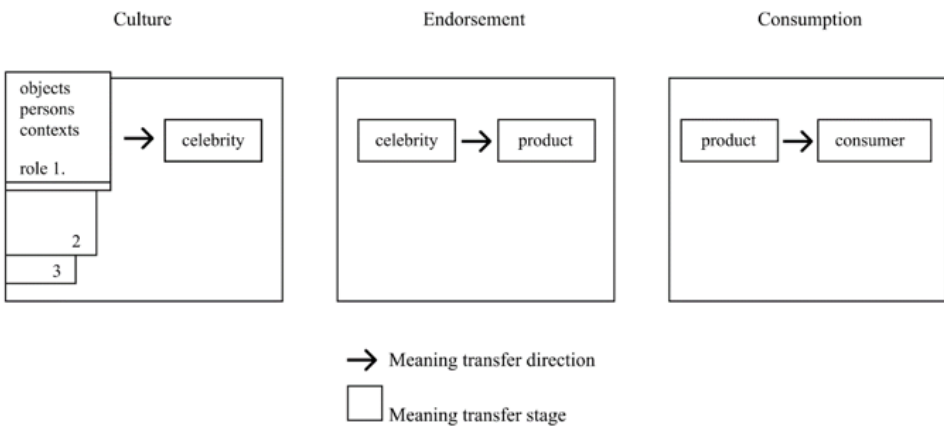
Lending the image is not only the domain of stars, but they have a certain advantage over other people. Thanks to their popularity, they can make the product seem more reliable to consumers [Starzyńska, 2016, p. 257].

J. Kall claims that actors, athletes or musicians lend their image for promotion, because it is very important from the point of view of effective persuasion. These people are the ‘elite’. They are popular and are liked by many people [Kall, 1998, p. 131].

Cooperation with well-known personalities is a considerable expense for enterprises. Their salary depends on their position in the celebrity hierarchy. The most recognizable ones achieve revenues of several dozen or several hundred million dollars a year. The managers of an enterprise hope in the long run, thanks to such activities, to achieve higher sales, profits and share in a target goods market [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, p. 7].

To better understand the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement, it is worth looking at the model proposed by McCracken, created in the early 1980s. It is a model of transfer/transmission of cultural meanings and it is presented in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. Transfer of meaning and supporting the product with the image of a celebrity (endorsement)



Source: G. McCracken, Who Is The Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process, „Journal of Consumer Research”, (12), 1989.

Each product can be associated with any meaning. Some categories of products are much easier to associate with certain meanings, e.g. expensive luxury

car is a social status. Advertising is a strong instrument of meaning transfer and thanks to it, products can be associated with meanings that an entrepreneur, researchers and the creative department want to give it [Wiśniewska, Liczmańska-Kopcewicz and Jagielski, 2019, pp. 14-16]. The latter are particularly responsible for the appropriate articulation of meanings. The final consumer goes through the moment when he recognizes the similarities between the elements and the product in an advertisement. It focuses on cultural meanings that are contained in people, objects and contexts of advertising. Well prepared advertising facilitates the metaphorical flow of information from advertising to the product; bad does not support this process [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, p. 2].

In order for the money spent by brands on advertising and the contracting of celebrities to be a good investment, the meanings contained in the products must be passed on to consumers. By purchasing products, they not only reach for the offered utility, but also for the significance they possess [Liczmańska, 2016, p. 40].

Famous personalities represent a huge number of meanings available, depending on their gender, status, age, personality and lifestyle. Thanks to such a health of choice, brands can match the right celebrity to a product and get a consistent communication message [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, pp. 3-4]. The best image support takes their strength and effectiveness from the meaning transfer process [Wiśniewska, et. al, 2019, pp. 13-15].

There are many types of collaborations between a celebrity and a brand. Celebrity endorsers can, for example, express their positive opinion about a given brand, show how a product or service works, and personally interview a satisfied customer [Kall, 1998, p. 131; Wiśniewska, Liczmańska, 2013].

The simplest division of types of cooperation are paid and free activities. As part of paid cooperation, forms can be mentioned [Szostaczko, 2015, p. 45]:

1. a celebrity who is financed by a brand, e.g. Venus Williams, who signs a contract with Reebok. A potential Reebok customer can conclude that with the purchase of products worn by Venus, part of her skills will go to him;
2. a celebrity who is the face of a brand advertising campaign, e.g. Lionel Messi promoting Lay's brand chips;
3. a celebrity who is a brand ambassador, e.g. Charlize Theron, who only publicly wears Raymond Weil watches;
4. a celebrity who designs for a given brand, e.g. Isabel Marant collaboration with H&M;
5. a celebrity who signs the line of a given brand, e.g. David Beckham, signs his underwear for H&M.

An example of free cooperation activities between company and a public person could be gifting. An example could be the arrival of a well-known celeb-

city to Poland. Brands know this in advance, so they can prepare well and send the star various products, e.g. clothes, jewelry etc. When celebrities like the gifts, they can use them, take a photo of themselves and tag a company in social media.

Due to such activities, the brand's popularity increases in the absence of direct financial outlay on celebrity endorsement.

Support provided by celebrities can also be divided into [Murdoch, 2005, p. 207]:

1. direct method – the celebrity supports and signs a given product or service;
2. method – a celebrity uses a given product or service;
3. subconscious way – the celebrity is only seen with a product.

The sports industry is the lion's share of the advertising market.

The best athletes are not limited to the promotion of products and services related to sports [Starzyńska, 2016, p. 257]. Examples of famous athletes who are the faces of well-known brands are:

- Robert Lewandowski – Huawei, Head & Shoulders, Gillette;
- Cristiano Ronaldo – Nike, Electronic Arts, Herbalife, MTG;
- Lionel Messi – Adidas, Huawei, Lay's, Pepsi.

For promotional activities involving celebrity endorser to be effective, it must meet several criteria, so that the information it provides has a persuasive power [Murdoch, 2005, p. 208]:

- Must be credible. The authority has the knowledge, experience and skills that are key to passing recommendations as an objective opinion holder;
- It must be seen as a source of specialist expertise. An expert is perceived as a better and more important source of information than a person not involved in a given field;
- Must be formidable. The recommender should be objective, loyal and honest.

There are three main processes occurring during the activities of public figures with brands [How to Choose a Celebrity for the Brand, 2014]:

- transference – occurs when a celebrity supports a brand associated with his profession, e.g. an athlete wearing Nike or Reebok clothes. According to the theory of interference, a consumer buying a promoted product may feel that some of the skills of a public figure can pass on to them when they make a purchase;
- attractiveness – consumers want to look and have the same lifestyle as their idols. Buying products that are associated with celebrities can feel closer to them;
- congruence – it is important that the cooperation between the celebrity and a brand is natural enough for the consumer to believe that a star wants to use the brand's products of his own free will.

### 3. THREATS RELATED TO CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

It is worth remembering that promotional activities involving celebrity endorsers also contain some risks. Sometimes it happens that a celebrity overshadow a product with its splendor and consumers remember mainly the participation of a star and not the advertised product [Kall, 1998, p. 131]. After many years, the Japanese car manufacturer Mazda abandoned the project in which actor James Garner lent his image to promote vehicles.

The company director stated that cars were to be in the foreground, not an actor [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, p. 5].

Another danger is the excessive exposure of the public figure. This happens when a celebrity promotes too many brands at the same time. Consumers may say that a star does it for money only and can become skeptical. To prevent this from happening, brands can secure themselves, e.g. by signing exclusive contracts with celebrities, but this is in turn very expensive thing. More aware public figures will give up participation in too many promotional campaigns for fear of damaging their image. For example, Cher, a show business star, did the same.

When she noticed that advertising too many products had destroyed her credibility, she decided to stop such activities [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, p. 5].

In addition, famous people often face various problems in their careers.

Often their fame decreases due to, for example, a failed CD or outrageous behavior. When this happens, advertising with this character can do more harm than good. A significant number of public figures were involved in various scandals related to views or addictions. An example of breaking a contract between a brand and a celebrity is the dispute between Pepsi and Madonna. Pepsi was the sponsor of the singer's concert tour, but after the music video "Like a Prayer" they broke the contract. Numerous religious groups have claimed the offense of their feelings because the clip showed some erotic scenes inside the church. Pope John Paul II threatened the singer with excommunication, and also called for a boycott of the concert tour promoting the album [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, p. 5].

Some celebrity statements can cause a lot of controversy. Actress Cybil Shepherd advertised The Beef Industry Council beef, but she admitted that she did not eat meat at all. She later stated that this sentence was out of context and she does not eat fatty meat, but the brand that paid her for participating in the promotional campaign was forced to explain this incident [Awdziej and Tkaczyk, 2002, p. 5].

To protect against unexpected twists while collaborating with celebrities, brands carefully examine public figures' private lives and actions before establishing cooperation. One of the ways is also to include numerous clauses in contracts that deal with regulating the behavior of personalities.

In next sections the methodology and presentation of own research about celebrity endorsement is presented.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative study has been chosen as the research method, which makes it possible to conduct a survey. The survey was titled „Role and importance of public figures in the process of consumers decision making and brand promotion”. The research tool consisted of closed questions only. 42 respondents completed the surveys over the Internet. The research took place in June 2020.

#### 5. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

Half of the respondents are women (21) and half are men (21).

Most of the respondents are between 18 and 25 years old – 34 (81%). 2 (4.8%) people are under 18. 3 (7.1%) respondents are between 26 and 35 years old.

2 (4.8%) respondents are between 36 and 45 years old. The last one is person (2.4%) above 45 years old.

3 (7.1%) respondents have primary education. 2 (4.8%) respondents have vocational education. 26 (61.9%) respondents have secondary education. 11 (26.2%) respondents have higher education.

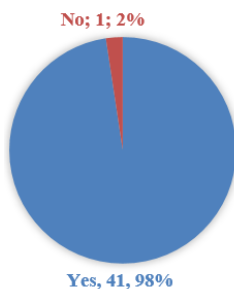
8 (19%) respondents live in the countryside. 12 (28.6%) respondents live in a town with less than 100,000 inhabitants. Half of the respondents (21) live in a city with 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants. 1 person (2.4%) live in a city with above 500,000 inhabitants.

19 (45.2%) respondents are students, 12 (28.6%) are employed or have own business, 10 (23.8%) are working students and 1 (2.4%) person is unemployed.

The purpose of the research was to check if public figures have impact on consumers decision making and brand promotion.

First question was „Do you know who a public figure is?”. 41 (97.6%) respondents marked that they know who the public figure is. Only one person marked „no”. Almost every respondent knows what the public figure means.

Pic. 1. Knowledge of the “public figure” term

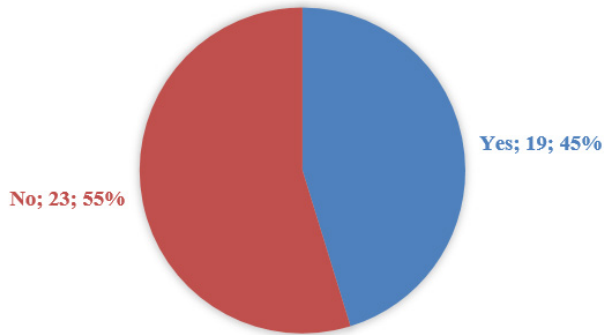


Source: Own research based on survey conducted.



Second question was „Do you know what a celebrity endorsement is?”. 23 (54.8%) respondents do not know what a celebrity endorsement means. 19 (45.2%) marked „yes” as an answer for this question. More than half of the respondents do not know the term of the celebrity endorsement.

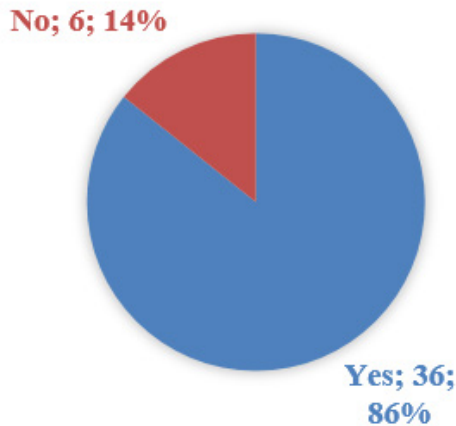
Pic. 2. Knowledge of the “celebrity endorsement” term



Source: Own research based on survey conducted.

34 (81%) respondents marked „yes” for question „Do you pay attention to advertisements posted by celebrities/famous people?” Only 8 (19%) respondents do not pay attention to this type of advertisements.

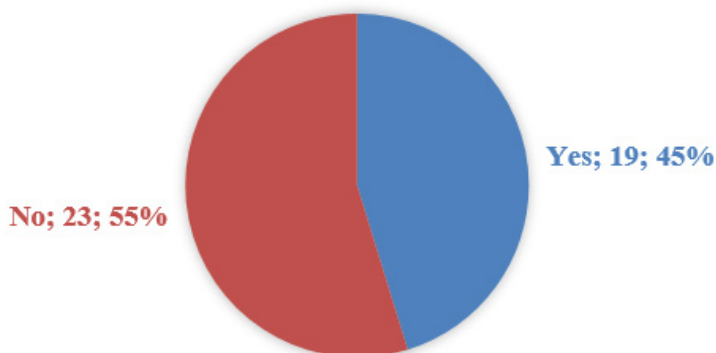
Pic. 3. Paying attention to advertisements posted by celebrities/famous people



Source: Own research based on survey conducted.

36 (85.7%) respondents agree with this sentence „Do you think that using the image of a public figure is an important element in promoting products and services?”. Only 6 (14.3%) respondents do not agree with this.

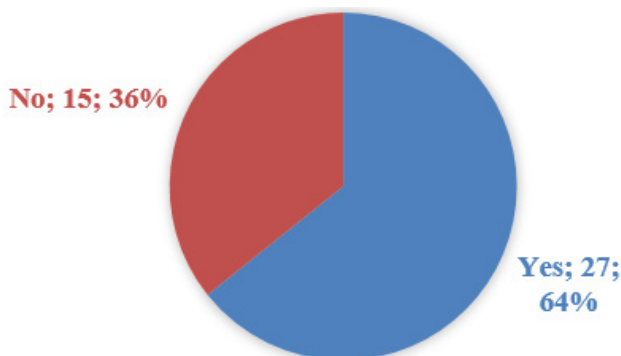
Pic. 4. Using the image of a public figure is an important element in promoting products and services



Source: Own research based on survey conducted.

Next question is „Have you ever bought something because it was recommended by a public figure?” Only 15 (35.7%) marked „no”. It means 27 (64.3%) respondents have bought something because it was recommended by a public person.

Pic. 5. Buying something just because it was recommended by a public figure

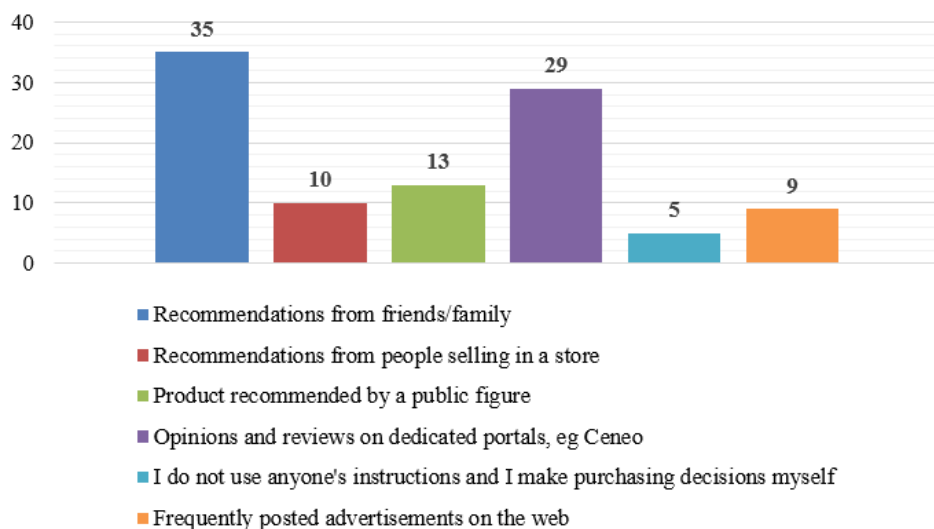


Source: Own research based on survey conducted.

For „On what basis do you most often make purchasing decisions? You can choose max 3 answers.” were 6 answers to choose from: recommendations from friends/family, recommendations from people selling in a store, product recom-

mended by a public figure, opinions and reviews on dedicated portals, e.g. ceneo.pl, I do not use anyone's instructions and I make purchasing decisions myself, frequently posted advertisements on the web. The most important factors are: recommendation from friends or family (35 respondents) and opinions on dedicated portals (29 respondents). 13 respondents make purchasing decision, because product is recommended by a public figure. It shows that recommendation by a public figure is really important, but not the most important factor that has an impact on purchasing decisions. The least frequently chosen answers are: recommendations from people selling in a store, frequently posted advertisements on the web and making independent decisions.

Pic. 6. The most common basis for purchasing decisions



Source: Own research based on survey conducted.

## SUMMARY

In summary, the benefits of working with celebrities are multidimensional. Brands believe that the presence of public figures will allow them to draw the attention of consumers and knock out their product against the background of high competition. Appropriate cooperation between a brand and a celebrity can bring very good results. Usually, the costs incurred by a brand to use the image of a public figure are smaller than subsequent profits from cooperation.

In times of high competition, marketing communication requires increasingly effective senders and increasingly memorable, adequate messages that will shape consumer attitudes.

Using the image of public figures in advertising is a very broad topic. It is worthy of deeper research on a larger group of respondents. The bigger research was not possible for authors due to low number of questionnaires returned.

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