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Holistic Model of Celebrity Endorsement in Political Marketing

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HOLISTIC MODEL OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT IN POLITICAL MARKETING

Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to provide useful tools for integral look at the celebrity endorsement process in political marketing that results in a holistic concept. The need for its creation was initiated by several authors, highlighting the inadequacy of partial approaches and thus limited possibilities for application of the existing models. Today, the main shortcomings of existing concepts of the theory and research in the field of celebrity endorsement lie in its fragmentation and inconsistency. The proposed model, based on theoretical research, has the ambition to open a wider debate on the issue and to provide practical tools for better understanding of the phenomenon.

Key words:

celebrity, political marketing, celebrity endorsement, models of celebrity endorsement

Introduction

Endorsements by celebrities (or celebrity endorsements, CE) are today an established element in brand and product communication including political marketing. From the marketing point of view, political subjects (PS) are in many ways similar to any other products that need to be put, communicated and sold on the market. In general CE is even more frequent in political marketing than in any other type of marketing communication. Celebrities, just like many other “ordinary” people, want to express their political views, and they do it by using various types of media (traditional media, but also digital ones including social networking, blogging etc.). A large proportion of celebrities’ support is therefore not controlled by marketers. In other words, many celebrities just express their

support without asking PS (or their marketing managers) in advance. Therefore, framework of this paper leads us to reduce our point of view only to regular or pre-managed CE.

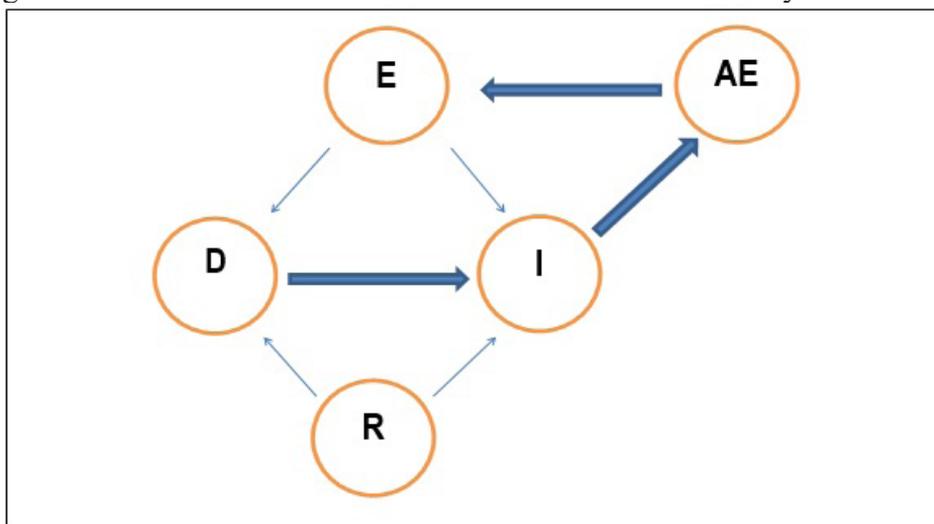
The most famous definition of a celebrity endorser is a definition by Norman McCracken: celebrity endorser is a person who „enjoys a public fame and such a fame is used in a way that he/she appears in advertisements for a promoted product” (McCracken 1989: 310-321). In political marketing, CE is a quite popular communication tool. For instance, CE supporting candidates for presidents in the USA have had a long tradition. Ruth Morello states that their beginning can be traced in the campaign in 1920, where some significant celebrities of those times (the stars like Al Johnsons or Mary Pickford were among them) and thus they supported one of the candidates – Warren Harding (Morello 2001; Garthwaite, Moore 2008). Nowadays, the CE in the USA are considered to be an important part of presidential campaigns. In the 2012 campaign, Barack Obama had several commentators – celebrities on his side. Apart from many others he was supported by George Clooney, Scarlett Johansson, or Kate Perry.

Research focused on celebrity endorsement in marketing communication led to the creation of several models aiming at explaining the process. A group of more concrete models includes so called Source models (Source credibility model and Source attractiveness model), but also Meaning transfer theory and Elaboration likelihood model (see Tellis 2000; Světlík 2012). A group of wider models including the so called synthetic models (TEARS, No Tears a FREDD) does not provide the unifying principle explaining the CE in advertising, but instead it offers several equivalent parallel explanations altogether creating a specific manual for marketing and communication practices. While TEARS and No Tears models are of synthetic nature, the significance of the Meaning transfer model lies in its attempt of McCracken (1989) to overcome Source models and bring a whole new perspective on the topic. Finally, the Elaboration likelihood model is a concept that reaches beyond the research of CE, but its application in this area is recommended by a number of authors (Tellis 2000; Světlík 2012).

The holistic view proposed in this paper is based on general logic of marketing communication in which the message communicated leads to recipients' reaction on the level of changing their image or changing their behavior. The feedback indicators are thus key ones for the process, so it is important to incorporate them into our model which will then, thanks to this inclusion, get a cyclical quality. In this context, a specific sign in CE will also be the presence of human component that stretches the question of feedback beyond the scope of advertising communication, particularly, into the sphere of coherent behavior of celebrity endorsers even outside the advertising space.

Based on the available bibliographic resources we set out five main phases of the CE: decision making, identification of celebrity, ad execution, risks and effects. The relations between these components are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Schematic visualization of Holistic model of celebrity endorsement.



Source: original research. Legend: D – decision making, R – risks, I – identification of celebrity, AE – ad execution, E – effects. Gross arrow - a sequence of CE process. Thin arrow - impact of external factors

Holistic Model Stages

Primary decision determinant of CE is the current image of the PS, the secondary being a vision, where PS communicated in this way should be positioned in the future. Since CE is one of the ways how to transform the original perception of the promoted subject to the desired one, it is essential to consider both its positives and negatives within the execution process.

Decision

The process of decision making whether and how to apply CE should be as complex as possible. Beside positive aspects, where the common factor is frequently a routine and prevailing practice and not the current state in the research of effectiveness, marketers should also consider the negative aspects that are often generalized as CE being an overly expensive and ineffective promotional technique. Fundamental knowledge, that should be used as a starting point for CE lies in the thesis that only the juxtaposition celebrity – PS without any sophisticated, attractive and creative advertising and communication plan

does not work in practice and vice versa, if the particular rules for involving celebrities into PS endorsement positions are kept, there is a high chance for effective and, in all directions, profitable communication.

An important factor when considering CE is a financial demand. The extremely high financial costs related to CE make exactly the core of the main discourse frameworks of this marketing technique. The view of the public tends to focus only on the financial costs that without appropriate incorporation into production context and particularly into advertising placement in the media seem to be inadequately high. The situation in political marketing is less stressful compared to commercial marketing. Celebrities support PSs not only for financial profit, but also for the ideological reasons. From this perspective, financial cost should not be the main reason for applying/not applying CE in political marketing – quite contrary to the commercial marketing.

In the decision stage, the professionals responsible for the promotion should define targets that they want to reach. In praxis, every social group can be reached by celebrities, as there are many celebrities with different specs available in each country. As PSs try to reach voters from various social segments, they use several CEs in each campaign.

Apart from the assumed public interest in famous personalities and their appearance in media space, there can be an ambition to secondarily influence the public by publishing such information. We mean publishing information through PR department of the promoted subject and in this way supporting the advertising campaign through public relations and media relations.

Celebrity identification

Second stage – identification or celebrity selection – is related to the evaluation if a particular celebrity is well suited for the PS. Since the problem of the selection is the key problem in CE, it is reflected widely in literature. The qualities of the potential CEs are given constant beforehand thus clarifying communication goals. Since that, the qualities are rather emphasized and confirmed in the process of advertising communication and only occasionally they can be transformed.

A common target of the models TEARS and No Tears is to set which qualities of a celebrity should be considered in the selection process. Abstracting from the models mentioned and based on the frequency of particular criteria, we consider to be the most important: credibility, expertise, attractiveness and celebrity likeability and the attitude of a celebrity endorser towards the brand/product promoted.

Ad execution

The third phase of CE process is the execution of a commercial material (television spot, print media etc.). Besides a role the celebrity has in a commercial, the final execution of the ad is also a very important determinant of effectiveness in advertising communication (Belch & Belch 2013: 164). From that point of view, it is not only important how a celebrity is perceived, but also the perception of the commercial itself. It is noteworthy that while in professional literature a lot of attention is given to celebrity selection, only a small space is given to the analysis of ad execution. The execution of a commercial offers a unique opportunity to use the CE potential at its best. It is obvious, that the ad execution is in comparison to other aspects of advertising at least an equal component of the persuasive influence a commercial has on its recipients. Brian D. Till (1998: 400-409) recommends to present brand/product and a celebrity in a creative symbiosis¹, but at the same time in a simple, clear-cut manner without an elaborate design.

We meet a wide spectrum of CE in practice: from a simple appearance to the full focus on the celebrity as a sole and dominant component. A similarly wide spectrum can be observed in relation to the technical demand of the execution. The spectrum of realization possibilities is a wide one: from technically precise commercials that remind film scenes to intentionally or unintentionally unconvincing ones.

Risk

As with other elements of marketing communication, also a use of CE entails certain risks. With regard to the inevitable financial expenses, it is especially important to focus on the marketing research. Hamish Pringle (2004) stresses the use of quantitative pre-testing of a particular ad execution with celebrities as in the case of advertising in general. Although such pre-testing is a financially demanding matter, it can stop from unexpected interpretation of an advertising message. Pre-testing and consequent commercial correction can significantly increase its efficiency. The original idea to link a celebrity with a PS should be proved by qualitative methods in the first place, especially by the in-depth interviews and group discussions. The outcome of the results should show how the proposed celebrity is perceived by particular representatives of consumer segments and how they view the suggested link between a celebrity and PS. The respondents can, on one hand, disqualify a celebrity endorser, on the other, they can help marketers to identify other, more suitable

1 For more on creativity in advertising see also K. Fichnová, L. Wojciechowski & P. Szabo (2012: 106-115).

(celebrity or non-celebrity) endorsers. Pringle (2004: 182) states that the risks of relating a celebrity with a promoted subject can be put into four categories: 1) incorrect celebrity choice, 2) video vampirism, 3) illegal celebrity employment and 4) celebrity related scandals. A suitable division of celebrity endorsement risks, that would allow us fully reflect also Pringle's categorization is provided by Banyte et al. (2011), who talk about 1) celebrity related risks, 2) products related risks and 3) financial and other risks.

The effect

We can think about the effectiveness of a commercial on three levels: cognitive, affective and behavioral. On a cognitive level, the advertising message is being processed and saved in the recipient's memory. The affective level is related to creating attitudes towards advertising and the behavioral one links to consumer behavior caused by advertising. While the research of the first two has a vast methodological apparatus, the reflection of behavioral level is much vaguer.

Pringle (2004) emphasizes that the convenience of employing celebrities for marketing communication needs comes even from its definition: they are subjects that are publicly well-known. Not only does the public register their existence but, what is even more important from the point of view of (political) marketing communication, the celebrities attract attention and secondarily focus the attention and target it at the subjects being promoted. Since the key aspect of cognitive information processing is the distinction of the brand/PS from the competition (Světlik 2012: 46), the use of CE on this level of communication can be very effective. According to various authors (e.g. Erdogan 1999: 291-314) CE seems to be a convenient tool for raising the appeal, improving image, launching a brand and even for brand repositioning. A great benefit of CE is a high probability that the opinions and attitudes communicated (by celebrities) will be kept by the recipients even when they forget who communicated the brand/PS in the commercial (Till 1998). Research done by Millward Brown Agency actually hints that the chance to recall a subject promoted by TV commercial is a bit higher if there is a celebrity endorser in the commercial (Pringle 2004). Generally speaking, it could seem that at the cognitive level, CE is a comprehensive and suitable marketing and communication technique.

There is, however, a group of opposing views on employing celebrities in advertising. The views are of two natures: either focusing on partial drawbacks related to celebrity endorsers or generally warning against any such application in advertising. David Ogilvy had a rather reserved or even negative opinion on CE, particularly in advertising spots. He assumed that "[t]hese are below average in their ability to change brand preferences. Viewers guess

that the celebrity has been bought, and they are right... Viewers have a way of remembering the celebrity while forgetting the product” (Ogilvy 1998: 109). According to Tellis (2000) in CE an important role imposes a risk that celebrities in spite of their social fame do not have to be necessarily associated with the required values. The perception of a celebrity by the percipients can change in time, thus there is – especially with controversial celebrities – a particularly high risk of employing them for any marketing communication needs. The Ace Metrics research report (Ace Metrix 2016; Adweek/Harris Interactive 2016) using own methodology and based on evaluation of 2600 commercials, pointed out similar, in some cases even lower, effectiveness of CE in comparison to other advertising forms. The authors of the report explain the frequent use by uncritical belief of marketers in traditional communication tools. The authors also consider the assumed CE effectiveness to be one of the myths in current marketing communication.

In relation with the stated communication effects, application of CE also opens questions concerning behavioral framework, which means the impact on the voting behavior. Friedman’s research from 1997 found that endorsement, either via celebrities of other types of endorsers, led percipients to heightened expectations, shopping intentions and higher credibility in comparison to the adverts without it (Doss 2011). Even though most of current authors understand CE in relation to the shopping/voting behavior and brand image as one of its variables (although potentially very important) and are very cautious with its application, others (Shafiq, Raza, Zia-Ur-Rehman 2011) based on empiric research data argue that CE demonstrates a significant link to shopping behavior.

Conclusions

The Holistic model of celebrity endorsement applied in political marketing does not aim at distorting the traditional models mentioned above, but wants to spread the concept of the process we researched. We would like to point out the limitations of the partial models in relation to (political) marketing practice. Our aim is to provide a holistic concept that together with the theoretical base enables more complex orientation of the topic. Holistic view also opens wider contexts related to the application of CE for promotional reasons than those included in the traditional models dealing with CE.

To certain extent, the proposed Holistic model of CE copies SOSTAC – a generic model of marketing communications plan. Strategy and tactics are translated into celebrity use and selection. The final stage of SOSTAC model covers indirectly also the efficiency of the marketing and communication tactics deployed and in a wider sense also a strategy. The control itself is, in the holistic

model, represented by a cyclical closure that is based on the evidence from CE practice and is also based on the image of this form of promotional practice as perceived by the marketers. All of this refers to its further utilization or to limiting its deployment.

The initial stage of the holistic model is considering the use of CE thus in the a decision phase. At this point, we see a significant importance in the risk evaluation that is very generic and lies especially in comparing with other available promotional tools. Not less important is another co-factor derived from the CE effectiveness in the context of the particular culture. The overall representation of celebrities in advertising, the image of such form of communication and preceding marketers experience with it also play an important part in the process. If a marketer believes that the rate between potential risks and effectiveness possibly shows a positive balance for the PS, the process of the identification of a convenient celebrity is then approached. In that phase, the influence of risks and assumed effectiveness are important but these are already related to particular celebrities. An important marker of potential future cooperation is not only the successfulness of the celebrity in consideration, but also his/her public behavior and the image obtained in the whole spectrum of media texts where the celebrity appears. The production of an ad follows after the celebrity identification and this stage is in our concept labelled as an execution stage. Together with a well selected celebrity we consider the commercial execution to be the most important pre-requisite of successful and effective communication. The final advertising spot can be subsequently placed into the media space. With the exception of regionally bound celebrities we assume a targeted commercial placement into rated media and peak broadcast time with a high viewer rating and in prime time.

Together with the placement of advertisements, the effectiveness of CE is influenced by a number of other factors that we have discussed above. Sufficient or insufficient efficiency gives marketers a signal about further use of CE. On another level, effectiveness offers feedback also for the celebrity selection in the future, since it helps marketers to distinguish successful and less successful celebrities.

In our model we elevate an advertising execution to the level equivalent to other components of the whole process. Execution can provide an important additional interpretation framework for the explanation of effectiveness in those advertising campaigns that apply CE.

The proposed model also follows certain limitations and shortcomings. The main potential deficiency relates to the nature of the models as such, namely with effort to capture a wide range of elements of facts. Since we refer to our mode as a holistic, it should be able to comprehensively cover the whole process

of CE, and therefore should be sufficiently general. To explain the partial problems of this critical process, therefore, we start from a research-validated model.

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