

The Use of Celebrity Endorsement as Marketing Communication Strategy by Turkish Airlines

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Abstract

In today's highly competitive market, companies use celebrities in advertisements. Due to the development in the field of mass communications, as one of the oldest branding tools, celebrity endorsement will keep its effect. Turkish Airlines has confirmed with its own example that the celebrity endorsement works and they have proven it globally.

The main objective of this paper is to show application of celebrity endorsement as a branding tool generally in airlines and specifically in Turkish Airlines, which has long term celebrity branding strategies. Current literature provides evidences that celebrity endorsement has positive impact on brand. The case of Turkish Airlines proved to be one more evidence that this positive relationship is really true.

Keywords: Branding, Celebrity Endorsement, Airlines, Turkish Airlines

1. Literature Review

Due to constant innovations in marketing during previous years, celebrity endorsers became a great marketing tool. There are various definitions of celebrities and celebrity endorsement. Different researchers mentioned and provided various explanations. C. Wright Mills (1956, pp. 71–72) defined celebrities as following:

"The celebrities are The Names that need no further identification. Those who know them so far exceed those of whom they know as to require no exact computation. Wherever they go, they are recognized, and moreover, recognized with some excitement and awe. Whatever they do has publicity value. More or less continuously, over a period of time, they are the material for the media of communication and entertainment. And, when that time ends – as it must – and the celebrity still lives – as he may – from time to time it may be asked 'Remember him?' That is what celebrity means."

On the other hand, according to McCracken (1989), celebrity may be any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement.

Mentioned definitions from sixties and eighties did not change a lot nowadays. According to Christina Schlecht, celebrities are people who enjoy public recognition by a large share of certain Group of people whereas attributes like attractiveness, extraordinary lifestyle are just examples and specific common characteristics cannot be observed though it can be said that within a corresponding social group celebrities generally differ from the social norm and enjoy a high degree of public awareness (Schlecht, 2003). One of the latest definitions says that celebrity is an individual “whose name has attention-getting, interest-riveting and profit generating value that stems from the high level of public attention and interest” (Gupta, 2009).

The term celebrity is normally associated with individuals who are frequently in the public eye and typically have a high profile in, among others, the sports and entertainment industries. Such individuals are used to endorse consumer services, products, ideas or organization (Canning & West 2006). Interesting perspective is provided by Moeran (2003) who stated that celebrities are household names whose reputations seemingly join together producers and consumers by means of the products (commodities, cultural productions) with which they are associated. Fleck et al. (2012) concluded that once a celebrity becomes famous and popular, he/she immediately appears in an advertisement and sometimes several at the same time. When speaking about characteristics that ideal celebrity needs to have, Keller (2008) mentions credibility in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, likability, attractiveness and specific associations that carry potential product relevance.

2. Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrity endorsement is phenomenon that was developing over years. Good definition of this term is provided by Khatri (2006) who stated that „endorsement celebrities usually lend their names to advertisements for product or services for which they may or may not be the experts”. However, celebrity endorsement could be defined as one of the most popular forms of marketing used to promote a range of consumer products and services (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta 2010). According to Byrne et al. (2003), celebrity endorsement has become one of the communication strategies employed by marketers trying to build a congruent image between the brand and the consumer. It is common that a product or brand is associated with one celebrity endorser over long period of time, but still marketers may rely on multiple celebrity endorsements which mean that they can use two or more celebrities in advertising campaign (Hsu & McDonald, 2002). According to Friedman and Friedman (1979) a “celebrity endorser is an individual who is known by the public for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed”.

According to Meijer (2010), the literature distinguishes three types of endorser: ‘regular’ consumers, experts and celebrities. The main difference between these types of endorser is based on distinguishing characteristics.

Regular consumers have the characteristic ‘similarity’; they do not require any special knowledge of the products being advertised. In other words, they don't have more than the knowledge gained through general use of the products. When using ‘regular’ consumers as endorsers, often, their name and profession is included in the advertisement. The main influential effects of ‘regular’ consumers as endorsers are chiefly based on the fact that on account of the perceived similarities, consumers feel an affinity with the endorser (Meijer, 2010).

Experts as their name suggests, have much expertise which is a component of the characteristic 'credibility'. Main characteristic of experts is that they have a superior knowledge of the product, usually gained through experience, study or training and that knowledge of experts about products is exactly what has an added value compared to 'regular' consumers as product endorsers. When using experts as endorsers in advertisements, sometimes in combination with their names, their professions are mentioned as well (Meijer, 2010).

Celebrities score high on the characteristic 'familiarity' (a component of the characteristic 'attractiveness'), and mostly they are well known for achievements in an area other than the advertised product. There are various celebrities types such as pop, film and TV stars, sportsmen/-women, politicians, artists, writers and scientists (Meijer, 2010).

2.1. Celebrity Endorsement Strategy

Well-chosen celebrity can at very least gain attention to a product or brand. Once company decides to use celebrity endorsement strategy, there is only one, but very critical question to answer: Which celebrity to select?

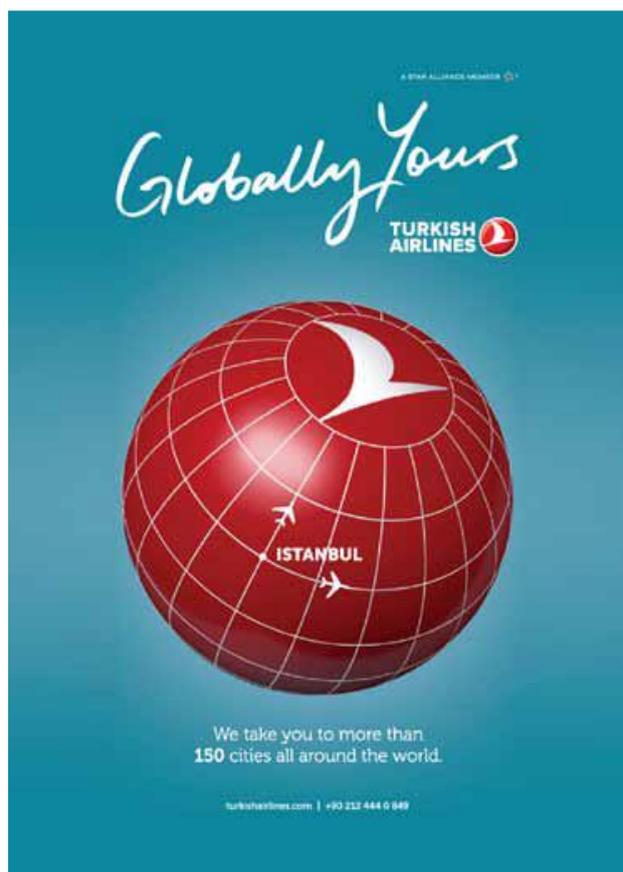
In fact, high positive effect of celebrity is not enough, since it must have also high appropriateness for the brand. Accordingly, Sylvester Stallone has high recognition and reputation, but he still would not be good choice for advertising World Peace Conference. Athletes are quite effective endorsing group; especially for sport related products such as beverages. Marketers are worried only for one thing, will additional sales stimulated by celebrity endorser cover all the costs and make profits. Additionally, it is not good if celebrity endorser promotes too many products at the same time. Even though if company hire celebrity endorser that is perfect with respect to previous criteria, still it should pray that he/she does not make some kind of scandal such as getting sick, involved in immoral actions, injured or die (Kotler, 1991).

2.2. Global Branding Strategy of Turkish Airlines

According to the Annual Report (2010), in 2010 Turkish Airlines increased the total number of its passengers by 16% to 29,1 million, which at the same time rose its share of global international passenger market by 1,25%. We cannot mention that in the same year Turkish Airlines signed the sponsorship contracts with two premium football clubs: F.C. Barcelona and Manchester United. This compelled top managers to realize the importance of brand value. To quote chairman Topcu (2010) and Karaman (2013):

"Becoming a strong global player requires to become a strong global brand." & "Becoming a global brand requires global successes".

These statements are very important to understand the corporate communication efforts of Turkish Airlines to build its brand image.

Figure 1 Turkish Airlines' logo

Source: Turkish Airlines Annual Report, 2010

Thanks to qualified and experienced team, Turkish Airlines continues to strengthen its global brand identity as it advances towards a leading position in the aviation industry (Annual Report, 2010, p10). Turkish Airlines takes pride in supporting both national and international activities in the areas of sport, culture, art and science and in channeling resources into social investments. In doing so, the company undertook sponsorships in many different areas in order to bring them closer not just to their own target audience but to all interested parties in the global arena (Morris, 2012).

Advertisement manager Mr. Sirin (2013) underlined the attention-based approach, the use of celebrities due to their ability to create an emotional-bond with the brand in the minds of the target audience. This was further strengthened with the recent research material which indicated that evaluate sponsorship primarily employed is an imperative from marketing mix under "brand" promotions.

2.3. Celebrity Endorsement and Think Global, Act Local Strategy

"The pathway of being famous requires seeming together with a famous."

Says the advertisement manager Sirin (2013), therefore many sub-messages which aims to appeal mainly to A+ passengers, based on psychological approaches had been supported with celebrities. Some of the examples are as follows:

Figure 2 Kevin Costner - "Feel Like a Star"



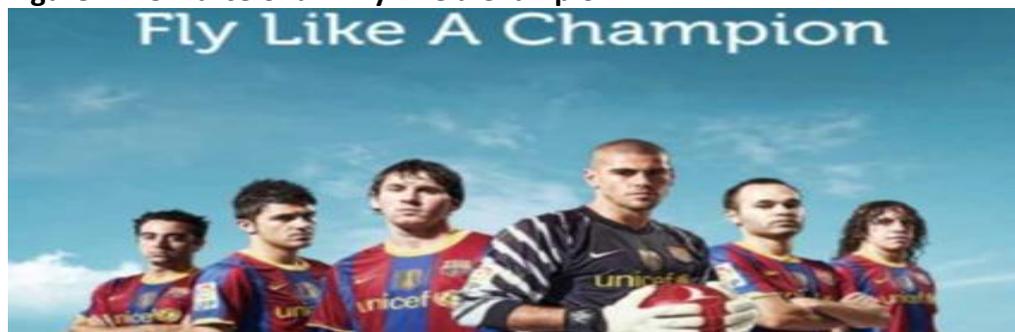
Source: Turkish Airlines, www.turkishairlines.com

Figure 3 Kobe Bryant - “Business Class for Stars”



Source: Turkish Airlines, www.turkishairlines.com

Figure 4 F.C. Barcelona - “Fly Like a Champion”



Source: Turkish Airlines, www.turkishairlines.com

Sirin (2013) explains their deployed different strategies in ‘meaning’ within their delivered messages in different countries as:

- 1- In Japan; Modest messages
- 2- In England; Proved messages
- 3- In America; Assertive messages
- 4- In Arab Emirates; Privileged messages

Karaman (2013) refers this differentiation as a part of their international marketing strategy which approaches ‘think globally act locally’.

This further approved by Sirin (2013) when he stated “it is difficult to deliver the same intended meaning through your message(s) within different cultural context, nevertheless our marketing research showed that this can be achieved if an emphasizing put on ‘positive’ message delivery”. He further stated that if you could manage to reach them with their own

languages, you would gain their respect as a stranger who has made an effort to understand their culture and values.

3. CONCLUSION

In today's highly competitive market, companies use celebrities in advertisements. Due to the development in the field of mass communications, as one of the oldest branding tools, celebrity endorsement will keep its effect. Turkish Airlines has confirmed with its own example that the celebrity endorsement works and they have proven it globally.

Sport is a universal language and people have very tight connections with their sports teams worldwide. Like other sectors, airlines also intensively preferred sports sponsorship which is conceptualized in this thesis as a group celebrity branding. Total annual spend of airlines on sponsorship rights and celebrity endorsement agreements is estimated at \$515m. As examples, Lufthansa has been sponsoring German Football Team for a long time. Emirates has an impressive portfolio of sponsorships with European football teams like AC Milan, Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain and of course Arsenal. Etihad, has been the main sponsor to Manchester City since 2009. Southwest, currently has an official agreement with the National Basketball Association (NBA). Delta Airlines, is a still active sponsor of Los Angeles Lakers.

However a typical individual celebrity branding is also practiced by some of the selected airlines like the following. Etihad tried their luck with Katrina Kaif and it worked very well. Qantas on the other hand, used its brand ambassadors John Travolta, Miranda Kerr, Mark Weber and was positioned in the world of brands band also in the minds of its customers. Virgin Atlantic engaged James Bond image, featuring Daniel Craig.

Since Turkish Airlines aims to grow and become one of the key players in the airline industry globally, the management decided to create a global communication strategy to unravel global brand awareness and brand positioning.

Turkish Airlines continues supporting both national and international activities in the areas of sport, culture, art and science and in channeling resources into social investments. Turkish Airlines successfully used sports sponsorships and furthered strengthening their brand with some of the best football teams and associations in the world.

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