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5 Exposure Management

Fame only attacks civic culture when that fame is unmerited and produced by orchestrated hyperbole. Present-day unease with what is sometimes called the 'froth of celebrity culture', derives from the proposition that it is in the interests of the PR-Media hub to subject society to a perpetual fame blitz. The result is that individuals who possess no talent or substance, rocket to prominence and a hectic, unstable will-o'-the-wisp quality colonizes the body politic with respect to issues of fame.¹ It is not that the world is heedless of the requirement for fame or for celebrity leaders; it is that the collateral of fame today is widely discounted as base, and celebrity attraction is often regarded as being hollow, nowhere more so than in the case of celestoids. On top of this, too many achieved and ascribed celebrities are dismissed as popinjays of the PR-Media hub and big-business interests. But this begs the question of why celebrity froth has become ubiquitous.

In economics, inflation is understood to be the consequence of a disequilibrium between demand and supply. When consumer demand for a favoured commodity exceeds supply, the dilemma of allocation is reconciled by a rise in price. This also holds good for celebrity culture. The public demand for celebrities, and the propensity of big business and the PR-Media hub to shower economic rewards and prestige upon stars, reflects a disequilibrium between demand and supply. But what, at root, is the nature of the disequilibrium here?

Celebrity is not like a physical commodity. When a bad harvest results in fewer apples being gathered, the price of apples will rise. Celebrity impact factors are more complex and issues of overexposure and underexposure are pivotal. However, other than at the extremes, the metrics of celebrity exposure are notoriously imprecise, and handling exposure properly is an art. The aim is to bring the public on the side of the celebrity to maintain or augment star power. But the relationships between celebrities, the media and the public consist of delicate, volatile forces. One wrong move can make public sympathy explode. Conversely, there are moments in a celebrity career when the public cannot get enough of the star. Rationing the right photo opportunities, press interviews and public appearances is the Midas touch in effective exposure management.

Categorically speaking, overexposure is the condition in which celebrity supply is greater than consumer demand. Underexposure is the reverse condition, in which consumer demand exceeds supply. It is not just a matter of the physical quantitative

relationship between demand and supply, that is how many times celebrities or products authored by celebrities tangibly appear before the public. It is also a question of impact factors, which has to do with more elusive, esoteric qualitative relationships of image aggregation and image accumulation. As Bernays says, the challenge for the PR-Media hub is to 'know how to regiment and guide the masses' (Bernays, 1928: 127).

To come first to the issue of physical access, as a general rule, overexposure increases the propensity to diminish economic and cultural value. For example, Nicholas Cage and Anthony Hopkins are frequently scorned in the media for overexposure. By implication, they are indiscriminate about the film roles they accept. By appearing in too many films, they are held to weaken the star brand. On the supply side, too much access risks breeding a negative or nonplussed response from the public.

Celebrity endorsement, known as *celebrity vamping*, is the condition in which overexposure weakens public trust in celebrity product endorsement. Currently, in the industry, Kate Moss, David Beckham and Bono are often cited as leading examples of celebrity vamping.

Bono's reputation as a celebrity advocate and diplomat of good causes is legendary. He has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. He is regularly presented as a mover and shaker with world leaders on questions of Third World debt relief and aid. In the charity world he is formally associated with no fewer than twenty-nine mainstream charities: 46664, ALAFA, Amnesty International, Charity Projects Entertainment Fund, Chernobyl Children's Project International, DATA, EDUN, Food Bank For New York City, Global Fund, Greenpeace, Keep A Child Alive, Live 8, Make Poverty History, Mencap, Millennium Promise Alliance, Millennium Villages, Mulago Positive Women's Network, MusiCares, Not On Our Watch, ONE Campaign, (RED), Simon Community, The Lunchbox Fund, UNICEF, UN Millennium Project, War Child, Wildlife Conservation Society, Witness and Zero Hunger.

Kate Moss has been an advertising representative for Burberry, Calvin Klein, Roberto Cavalli, Dior, Louis Vuitton, David Yurman, H&M, Rimmel, Bulgari, Longchamp, Virgin Mobile and Nikon.

David Beckham has fronted advertising campaigns for Vodaphone, Rage TV, Police sunglasses, Pepsi, Adidas, Gillette, Calvin Klein, Motorola and Marks & Spencer.

For many analysts of celebrity culture, in all three cases the result is overkill. The novelist Paul Theroux (2006), who taught in Africa before he became a renowned writer, tore into Bono for supporting the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in offering Africa 'prestige projects' and 'voluntary labour'. He contends that Bono possessed

little more than a superficial understanding of Africa's real needs. Packages of debt relief and donating free computers and iPods to African villages have a high media profile in the West, but on the African continent they are soft targets for money laundering and fraud. For Theroux, the right priorities for aid money are the introduction of free and fair elections, husbanding principles of good governance and addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. Theroux sees Bono as a well-intentioned, out-of-touch rock superstar, who steamrolls glamour relief projects into the developing world. In doing so he unwittingly disrupts the less attention-seeking, informed work of professional aid workers.

Doubtless, Bono and his entourage would object strongly to being described as ill-informed. His career as a celebrity diplomat is founded in intense data gathering and briefing by specialized advisers. However, it is one thing to gather data and be briefed as a field worker and quite another to rely on a team of advisers in the middle of a world concert tour while also managing an extensive and complex business portfolio.

It also exposes him to the charge of developing relationships with public figures that the rock world condemns as strange bedfellows. In 2008 the media carried reports of grumblings from band members in U2 about Bono's extensive charity work. Larry Mullen regretted Bono fraternizing with Tony Blair, 'a war criminal' in the drummer's eyes; and the band's lead guitarist, The Edge, was reported to wearily counsel Bono against risking subordinating music to politics.

Against this, Cooper (2008) maintains that Bono's charity work has been subtle and effective. Bono's skills of behind-the-scenes diplomacy and brokerage are pointedly contrasted with the direct, belligerent approach taken by Bob Geldof. Cooper (2008) portrays Bono as a realist, who can launch a charm offensive rather than knock heads together to get results.

Be that as it may, the sheer number of charities that Bono supports, raises questions about the depth of his knowledge and personal involvement. It leaves him vulnerable to the charge of overstretching himself and having a superficial understanding of aid, relief and Third World politics. This is not without public consequences. As a general rule, the wider the number of good causes that a celebrity supports, the weaker the public faith in celebrity endorsement.

In 2006 Beckham was dropped by Police sunglasses and replaced by Antonio Banderas. Sources at the company said that his star appeal had diminished following England's lacklustre performance in the 2010 World Cup. However, industry analysts also blamed overexposure.

Kate Moss was dropped by the Swedish fashion retailer H&M in 2005, and her contract with Chanel was not renewed. The H&M termination of contract was connected with allegations about Moss's cocaine use. The reasons for the Chanel

termination were not publicly disclosed but are thought by analysts to be due to overexposure. The cocaine allegations tarnished Moss's public image as a carefree, independent modern girl. However, in the long run they did not significantly erode her appeal to advertisers. Moss dealt with the overexposure issue boldly by launching her own line of clothes with TopShop in 2007 and the release of a Moss set of fragrances with Coty.

Although celebrity vamping and overexposure are often condemned as the result of the sin of avarice, they are sometimes the outcome of circumstances that are beyond the star's control. In particular, when the breakthrough of a star follows a long period of public indifference, it increases the propensity of all copyright holders to clear their inventories. For example, when David Bowie became a cult sensation with the release of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* with RCA Records in 1973, Deram Records rereleased his kitsch, novelty single, 'The Laughing Gnome' (originally released in 1967), which was aimed at the infant market. The novelty song was an embarrassing contrast with Bowie's new bisexual, cutting-edge art image. But RCA and Main Man Records, the companies that represented him, were powerless to halt the progress of the single in the pop charts.

Just as commercial interests have inventories of product that may cause embarrassment to stars after they become famous, the pre-fame life of stars consists of an inventory of memories and folklore among friends and associates that may compromise the gloss of stardom. For example, Bill Clinton famously declared 'I did not inhale' when the media carried reports that he used marijuana when he was a student at Oxford University. The remark was a forerunner to his infamous comment in response to allegations of an affair with Monica Lewinsky: 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman'. Both comments damaged Clinton's presidency, because they suggested an untrustworthy, slippery leader.

On the other hand, the release of nude photographs of Madonna taken before she was famous did not damage her public appeal.² On the contrary, her reputation as a modern girl free from outmoded conservative hang-ups was enhanced. The prurient interest in these soft-core images may have been a factor in encouraging Madonna and her camp to launch her Sex book – a volume of nude photographs that was artful, but also calculating and explicit. By association, the pre-fame nude shots of Madonna evoked public memories of Marilyn Monroe's foray as a nude model. Madonna and Monroe appeared to be of the same mettle in courageously exploiting male-dominated media opportunities in search of deeper, more meaningful fame.

These examples again show that the fame formula is a deeply flawed doctrine. The formula exaggerates the power of cultural intermediaries to control image and impact factors, and it underestimates public literacy about celebrity brand construction and management.³

Achieved celebrities are the product of fame attainment and exposure management. Attainment and exposure management is what might be called, the prelife of the star. This contains an inventory of episodes and incidents before they were famous that can come back to haunt them. Inferior and ill-judged types of authorship and insalubrious conduct may produce challenges and difficulties for exposure management. Because cultural intermediaries have no outright power to control image inventory and stories that emerge from friends and associates, they do not genuinely have the capacity to regulate impact factors.

The problem is not restricted to copyright holders who have inventories that are authored or associated with celebrities before they entered the limelight. Copyright on images can be easily infringed by producers and bloggers. For example, Mario Lavandeira, the blogger behind the celebrity gossip website perezhilton.com was sued by Universal Pictures for featuring a topless photo of Jennifer Aniston on his site. Lavandeira's legal defence is that this and other celebrity photos on his website fall under the principle of fair use. That is they are used for commentary rather than for pecuniary gain. Further, the photos are edited. This supports the defence that parody is at play. In law, parody is understood to be a creative input that does not infringe copyright because a new cultural value is produced that is beyond the intention of the copyright holder. Thus, the photograph is transformed into an *original* work.

However, this is a grey area. It is one thing to maintain that the photos are not used directly for pecuniary gain. In contradiction, analysts note that the perezhilton.com site receives 2 million hits per month and charges \$9000 for advertising space. On the question of parody, it is one thing to edit a photograph, but what is being infringed is copyright over the general image of the star. If I unilaterally put a topless photo of Jennifer Aniston on my website, I am not simply reproducing her image; I am making public an image that she and her cultural intermediaries have not given me permission to use and may reasonably wish to suppress. For my communication of the photograph may alter the relationship between the public and her general celebrity persona. Since this image is the foundation of her public impact factor, I may be deemed to be acting in a way that is detrimental to her celebrity value with authorized sponsors, PR-Media personnel and the general public.⁴

Image aggregation and image accumulation

This brings us back to the technical issue at hand, which is the measurement of the non-physical characteristics of celebrity value. Technically, celebrity impact factors are situated at the crossroads between image aggregation and image accumulation. Image aggregation refers to the total number of images that are produced and distributed by cultural intermediaries. The general purpose behind

image aggregation is to build the brand. Into this category fall photographs, interviews, sound bites and press releases. The purpose of cultural intermediaries is to build a public image of the celebrity that ultimately carries high approval ratings with the public. This is not a simple matter of spreading good news and upbeat images. It is a complex, multi-layered process in which the distribution of data on celebrity foibles, vulnerabilities and partialities are used in a disciplined process of image factor enhancement.

But celebrity impact factor is not simply a matter of design; it is also a question of accretion. This is where the concept of image accumulation comes in.

The concept refers to the total number of images consumed, produced and exchanged by the public. By definition, this is beyond the capacity of cultural intermediaries to delineate and control. If you take a photo of Miley Cyrus or Nicole Richie and post it on your website you are adding to image accumulation.

This cannot be centrally controlled. To begin with, it involves multiple players who do not fall under the jurisdiction of a central authorizing agency. RCA and Main Man were unable to stop Deram offloading inventory of 'The Laughing Gnome' and I cannot be prevented, at least initially, from putting non-copyright protected snapshots of celebrities on my Flickr site for free exchange. In terms of exposure management, image accumulation amounts to a network without a centre. This complicates notions of authorized practice and protocols since exchange cannot be effectively authorized or policed.

In addition, while image aggregation is a matter of the star's subordination to designed exposure, image accumulation extends to unregulated practice and exchange. That is areas of social competence and social encounters that are beyond the reach of cultural intermediaries. In essence, this involves celebrities acting in their private lives in ways that are contrary to the public face assembled for them by cultural intermediaries. Examples are legion.

The TV presenter Fern Britton fronted the Ryvita Bikini Keep Fit Challenge (2008). During the campaign the tabloid press revealed that her weight loss was not the result of 'healthy eating and cycling', as she claimed, but gastric band surgery. Britton's campaign credibility imploded and Ryvita's brand took a trade hit.

Similarly, when Sharon Stone observed in a TV interview (2008) that the Sichuan earthquake was the result of 'bad karma', Christian Dior blocked advertisements in China that featured her and eventually cancelled her contract.

The Australian cricketer Shane Warne suffered the same fate when his contract with Nicorette chewing gum was cancelled after he was photographed smoking during the West Indies tour (1999).

Rather than attempt to provide an exhaustive list here, let us consider one recent, widely reported case to illustrate some of the issues and dynamics at work.

In 2009 Tiger Woods was reported to have earned \$100 million from sponsorship deals with AT&T, Pepsi, Nike, Tag Heuer, Accenture, Electronic Arts and Gillette. At the end of 2009, following revelations of his multiple marital infidelities, the soft drink company Gatorade announced it was dropping a Woods endorsed product, but claimed this was unrelated to the scandal surrounding Woods's private life. Gillette cancelled a thirty-second advert featuring Woods that was due to be aired on US television. The management consultancy firm Accenture terminated its sponsorship of Woods, citing that the golfer was no longer 'the right representative for the company'. AT&T followed Accenture in dropping Woods from their campaigns. However, Woods also received steadfast support from other sponsors, like Nike and Electronic Arts, who pleaded to the public for 'understanding' during what was acknowledged to be a 'difficult' time in Woods's private life.

Industry analysts estimate that the top five sports-related sponsors of Woods underwent a decline in market value following the revelations about his private life. Accenture and Gillette are reported to have suffered a 2 per cent fall. Electronic Arts, Nike and Gatorade lost over 4 per cent (Bhusnurmath, 2010). This loss is passed on to shareholders and while it may not be permanent it raises the question of whether the investment in Woods is worth the rate of return.

Cultural intermediaries around Woods have responded with a programme of concentrated exposure management designed to accomplish rehabilitation. Initially, Woods dismissed allegations of marital infidelities as malicious hearsay. This was misjudged.⁵ Eventually, he was prevailed upon to give a scripted public apology admitting irresponsibility and unacceptable behaviour in his marriage. Interestingly, in addition to culpabilities of personality, his apology cited the vanity of celebrity culture in which an illusory belief that 'normal rules do not apply' is perpetuated. The effect was intended to be face-saving. In fact the conference compounded public disquiet about Woods because it involved him not only in confessing that he was an adulterer but also exposed him as a dissembler with the public. It will be a long road back to winning public trust and reviving the faith of sponsors. Gradually, he is being eased back into a low-profile role in golfing tournaments, with press access strictly controlled. However, the separation from his wife has now ended in divorce. The PR-Media hub will either decide that Woods has suffered enough or take the divorce as confirmation of his lack of fitness to endorse commercial brands.

At the time of writing, it is unclear if this exposure management programme will bear fruit. Woods was the first athlete to earn \$1 billion from sporting tournaments and sponsorship deals. This extraordinary financial success was built upon a public image of clean-cut, moral rectitude. The revelations about Woods's private life have produced deep cracks in the public face of his celebrity. It remains to be seen if

the rehabilitation campaign to restore corporate confidence in Woods as a prime marketing device bears fruit.

Celebrity cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is the enemy of exposure management.⁶ When the public has expectations of celebrity character and practice that are not corroborated by celebrity actions, the result is friction and tension. For exposure managers, the challenge is to engineer realignment so that cognitive harmony between public expectations of celebrity and celebrity behaviour prevails. To quote Bernays again:

In our present social organization approval of the public is essential to any large undertaking. Hence a laudable movement may be lost unless it impresses itself upon the public mind. Charity, as well as business, and politics and literature, for that matter, have had to adopt propaganda, for the public must be regimented. (Bernays, 1928: 53)

The same law applies to celebrity exposure management.

By the 1960s the PR company that dominated Hollywood celebrity culture was Rogers & Cowan. In his autobiography, Henry Rogers (1980) identifies building trust as the core of effective celebrity exposure management and PR realignment. The leverage of trust is based on a relationship between the media and the client. Central to this task is possessing accurate data about public expectations (gathered through various forms of market research) and completely frank and honest exchanges with the client. Effective PR work means building high trust relations with the celebrity and getting the media on the side of the client.

But this presupposes that the media will be steadfast in matters of probity. Rogers refers to an incident involving Frank Sinatra. In 1961 the *New York Daily News* reported that Sinatra was under the influence of liquor at John F. Kennedy's inauguration ceremony. Rogers, acting for Sinatra, demanded a retraction from the press on the grounds that twelve witnesses were prepared to state that Sinatra behaved in a proper manner. The newspaper refused to take this course of action on the grounds that they did 'not like' Sinatra. Following legal advice, Rogers determined that suing the *New York Daily News* would be fruitless since it would a) be too costly, b) highlight and pander to public concerns about Sinatra's character and c) prove too challenging to make a persuasive case (Rogers, 1980: 164–5).

According to Rogers, most relations with the media are smooth and sound (Rogers, 1980: 169–70). However, he acknowledges that press events, press releases and interviews with the client carry hazards. In the case of press events, the main risks are, first, that the media does not attend; second, that the client is

asked a provocative question that creates a bad impression, leading to unfavourable reporting; and, third, that the media misinterprets the purpose of the press event by boosting an obscure element or ignoring the primary thrust of the meeting.

A similar range of risk issues arises with press releases. First, they can be ignored by the media; second, they are rewritten to provide a different slant on the intended message; and third, the release is invalidated by a change in circumstance which invalidates the original purpose of the document.

On the subject of interviews, Rogers notes five risks: first, the media does not attend the arranged interview; second, the client fails to attend the arranged interview; third, the interview takes place but does not produce copy; fourth, the press produces copy but the client complains that he has been misquoted; and, fifth, the article appears but is deemed by the artist and his retinue to be damaging (Rogers, 1980: 170).

Rogers uses the apt metaphor of walking the tightrope to convey the relationship of leverage between the client and the media. He writes:

As a public relations man, my contacts with the media are crucial if I am to serve my client effectively. Our relationship is based on trust – that is the press, television, and radio must trust me as a reliable source of information ... There must be an open, reciprocal working relationship between me and the media. If there is a breakdown in that relationship, I can no longer properly serve my clients. It is in this relationship with the media on one side and the client on the other, that I am constantly walking the tightrope. (Rogers, 1980: 163)

Optimal exposure management involves walking the tightrope effectively. Basic to this is steering image aggregation in the direction of building the celebrity brand. As a corollary, the PR-Media hub must acknowledge and apply a gatekeeping function to image accumulation. When the PR-Media hub makes a judgement that matters of public record will erode the star brand, various forms of damage limitation can be initiated. Some of the strongest weapons are candour and timing.

Compare the Tiger Woods sex scandal with the course taken by David Letterman and his advisers following a blackmail attempt to release details of his infidelities. Woods and the cultural intermediaries surrounding him initially tried to stonewall press reports about his extra-marital sex life, condemning them as hearsay or groundless rumour. When the momentum of allegations became irresistible, Woods was forced to make a public apology, which eventually took the form of a confession to the media. As a result, what Gamson (2001) calls the 'institutionalized morality' backlash of the media came into play. The media reaction to the Woods sex scandal was amplified and remedial strategies were compromised. Woods was accused not only of proven marital infidelities but of lying to the press and the public. As it

became disclosed that Woods's liaisons were overwhelmingly with young white women, racial overtones were added to the imbroglio.

In contrast, Letterman faced the allegation of marital infidelity head-on. Following a blackmail attempt to extort \$2 million from him, he took a prime-time slot on his show to confess to the public about his infidelities. Letterman's candour, allied with his representation of himself as the victim of a blackmailer, defused the ritual media condemnation that follows a sex scandal. He took the hit of being publicly identified as an adulterer, but gained credit for openly and quickly confessing to his misbehaviour and gained public sympathy by citing the private anguish he suffered at the hands of the blackmailer.

The avid public interest in the private troubles of stars brings us back to the question of why celebrity culture is ubiquitous. Exposure is subject to laws of supply and demand. We must now come to the subject of the parts that supply and demand play in the inflation of celebrity culture.