

# Influence of Celebrities on the Image Building of Luxury Brands

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**Abstract.** In the era of we-media, brand marketing has increasingly shifted to the online realm, with more and more brands leveraging the influence of celebrities to capture the public's attention. However, the utilization of celebrity endorsements in brand promotion presents several intriguing challenges and questions that warrant careful consideration. Key among these are the criteria for selecting celebrities, strategies for maximizing the benefits of celebrity endorsements, and approaches to mitigating any potential negative impact on the brand. This study delves into the powerful influence wielded by celebrities, with a specific focus on the case of Cai Xukun's endorsement of PRADA. It seeks to explore how the unique characteristics and appeal of celebrities can significantly shape and transform a brand's image. By doing so, this research provides invaluable theoretical insights and support for luxury brands aiming to effectively identify and collaborate with suitable internet celebrities to enhance their brand image in the digital age. Understanding the dynamics of celebrity endorsements in the context of luxury brands is becoming increasingly vital in today's marketing landscape. By analyzing the multifaceted impact of celebrity endorsements, brands can strategically navigate the complexities of the online world, harnessing the full potential of celebrity influence while safeguarding their brand's integrity and reputation. This research contributes to a deeper comprehension of this phenomenon and paves the way for more informed and effective celebrity-driven brand strategies in the future.

**Keywords:** Celebrities, Celebrity effect, Luxury Brands, Image Building.

## 1. Introduction

In today's society, celebrities have a huge influence on various fields. In addition to selling their products directly to consumers, enterprises and brands begin to use the influence of celebrities to enhance the advertising effect. Their purpose is to win in the era of user-oriented, product homogenization competition intensified in marketing. Through the publicity and hype of celebrities, originally unknown products can be indirectly familiar to the public.

Although academia has made some progress in studying the traits of online celebrities and their impact on consumers' willingness to buy, there is still relatively little research on the relationship between celebrities and a brand's overall image. In particular, the research in the field of fashion focuses more on fast fashion brands, while the discussion on luxury brands is relatively rare. In addition, at present, brands lack a set of scientific evaluation criteria when selecting celebrities for marketing, which is also an urgent problem to be solved. With the rise of "we media", the influence of online celebrities has increased significantly on social media platforms. However, in addition to their personal characteristics, these celebrities also have a complex interactive relationship with the brand image. The core values, popularity, reputation and other factors of a brand can be positively or negatively affected by the promotion and endorsement of Internet celebrities. So, an in-depth study of the relationship between online celebrities and brands, and how they work together to build a brand image, will help to better understand the dynamics of modern brand marketing. Research in the fashion field has mostly focused on fast fashion brands, but luxury brands also play an important role in online celebrity marketing. The uniqueness and high-end positioning of luxury goods make it face unique challenges and opportunities in the communication of network celebrities. Therefore, the

study of the interaction between luxury brands and Internet celebrities is of great importance for an in-depth understanding of the development of the luxury market.

In the process of applying celebrity effect, there are still lots of problems worth pondering. For example: 1) the effective ways to choose the right celebrity; 2) the measures to maximize the benefits of using celebrities 3) whether the celebrity brings favorable influence on the brand; 4) the strategies to help avoid the adverse effects of celebrity effect on the brand.

This study attaches importance to the celebrity effect brought by celebrities and analyzes how the characteristics of celebrities affect the shaping of brand image through cases, providing theoretical support for how luxury brands can effectively and correctly use key opinion leaders to shape brand image, and helping brands find suitable Internet celebrities to better shape brand image.

This study first introduces the whole case of Cai Xukun's endorsement of PRADA, and then analyzes the impact of this event on the whole PRADA brand and consumers' attitude. Eventually, this paper provides some suggestions to help brands maximize the influence of celebrities.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Literature Review

Scholar Tan Shuang believes that the cooperation between brands and Internet celebrities is getting closer and closer. In the Chinese market, more and more brands attach importance to KOL marketing and promotion [1]. Zhu Siya's research found that there is no correlation between the amount of attention received by KOL itself and the effectiveness of advertising marketing [2]. On the contrary, the thematic strength of marketing content itself is an important factor in the success of marketing [2]. Different luxury brands tend to cooperate with different types of KOLs based on the brand's image and positioning [2]. According to the characteristics of different KOLs, scholar Zhou Yao divides them into three types: celebrity type, vertical type and pan-entertainment type. Among them, the "celebrity effect" brought by celebrities is particularly obvious in the consumer market dominated by young people [3]. Contemporary young people are more willing to spend on brands endorsed by their favorite stars, in this form to express their support for idols. Scholar Gu Xiaowei believes that the scientific use of image spokesmen can make the products or brand enterprises quickly win the recognition of consumers and attract widespread attention. At the same time, it is also conducive to promoting the effective operation of the public relations of brand enterprises, narrowing the distance with the media, increasing the exposure rate, and thus conducive to the establishment of corporate image [4].

### 2.2. The Concept of Celebrity Effect

Celebrity is a popular concept in the field of marketing, which refers to the promotion and influence of a celebrity on a brand or product. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in today's we-media era, as social media platforms give celebrities wider channels and audiences for communication. The celebrity effect is often based on the celebrity's visibility, reputation and influence, factors that make them powerful tools for brand marketing.

The core of celebrity is the celebrity's endorsement of a brand or product, which can be achieved through endorsements, promotions or collaborative activities. When a well-known celebrity partners with a brand, their reputation and image tend to be associated with that brand, thus enhancing the credibility and appeal of the brand. Consumers tend to associate a celebrity's positive traits and image with a brand, which can motivate them to be more likely to buy a product or service from that brand.

In addition, the celebrity effect can also expand the brand's visibility and market exposure. A celebrity's fans and audience usually follow their every move, so a celebrity's promotion on social media can spread quickly and attract more people to follow the brand. This increased brand exposure helps brands stand out in a highly competitive market.

However, the celebrity effect also has some challenges and risks. On the one hand, the image of celebrities may be affected by negative events or controversies, which will adversely affect the brand.

Celebrity partnerships, on the other hand, are costly and may be impractical for small brands or start-ups.

In short, celebrity effect is an important strategy in brand marketing, which can help brands attract more target audiences and enhance brand image and popularity. However, brands need to choose the right celebrity partners carefully, while also considering the potential risks and costs.

### **3. Case study: Prada and Cai Xukun**

#### **3.1. Case Background**

As a top luxury brand, PRADA has many spokespersons around the world. It used to choose Tom Holland, who played Spider-Man in Marvel movies, as the American spokesperson, and Emma Watson, who played Hermione in Harry Potter, as the British spokesperson. Due to the high popularity of the spokespersons around the world, it also broadens the market for PRADA. However, with the continuous collapse of several PRADA spokespersons in China, PRADA has constantly made compensation in this respect, and also damaged the brand image. One of the most typical is that in 2019 PRADA officially announced CAI Xukun as its global spokesperson, CAI Xukun received PRADA's invitation to participate in the Milan fashion show, he wore a PRADA, dyed blonde hair style is dazzling, and his interaction with the third generation of PRADA's boss Muccia Prada is eye-catching. As a spokesperson for Ms. Prada, CAI Xukun has been the top treatment, CAI Xukun looks and PRADA style is highly suitable and has its own distinctive personality label, as the top current idol star at that time, PRADA has brought up to 730 million topic exposure of huge traffic, with KUN word key chain out of global stock, It can be seen that CAI Xukun has great brand influence [5].

However, while spokespersons bring positive effects to the brand image, there is also the possibility of negative effects. In June 2023, the top current star CAI Xukun was deeply involved in the collapse of the house, and the PRADA brand image was also impacted, which was dubbed "the industry dark lamp" by netizens. The public and consumers' trust in PRADA has declined, and the brand's reputation has also been affected. Since then, on July 10, PRADA officially announced that it has reached a cooperation with the Chinese women's football team to provide formal occasions and travel wear. This move can be regarded as an important means for PRADA to recover its brand image, and the reliable image and trust of the public for China women's basketball team is mapped to PRADA itself through cooperation. The transformation of brand image can be seen through public opinion. A large number of netizens said that PRADA finally found the right person this time, choosing a spokesperson who is not easy to "collapse the house" [6]. It can be seen that when choosing spokespersons, luxury brands should not only consider their commercial value, but also their character and personality, because spokespersons have a great impact on brand reputation and long-term development [7].

#### **3.2. Case Influence**

PRADA, as a top luxury brand, gained a lot of exposure during CAI Xukun's endorsement. On the second day after PRADA's official announcement, the exposure of PRADA's hot topics exceeded 700 million, and the official video released on Weibo also had more than 30 million views. Prada has publicly stated that "fans get to know Prada not through us, but through KUN". The most obvious is CAI Xukun's influence on perfumes. He uses his identity as an original musician to write lyrics for each perfume, allowing PRADA to attract a group of consumers under the leadership of celebrity benefits [8].

However, after the "emotional storm", many brands avoided, and major brands have terminated their contracts. Consumers are also increasingly suspicious of PRADA's vision of KOL. In recent years, the stars who have endorsed PRADA in China have some "black history", which also makes consumers doubt the vision and standards of the brand's choice of spokespersons, and greatly reduces their trust in the brand. In the past few times, PRADA generally attached too much importance to the traffic of celebrities in the selection of spokespersons and did not do sufficient background

investigation in the early stage, blindly using traffic and the number of fans as the standard to determine business value. After this incident, PRADA chose a more secure Chinese women's soccer team as a spokesperson in the next cooperation. Although they do not have the same "hit the list" and exposure as the previous spokespersons, they have a harder strength and better reputation, which can bring a new round of commercial value to PRADA. On the other hand, it also stabilizes consumer sentiment.

## **4. The influence of celebrity effect on luxury image construction**

### **4.1. Define Brand Positioning**

Working with celebrities can help brand positioning. The brand image that luxury brands want to build is different, which is related to the positioning of the brand. Brand image refers to all the things that consumers can associate with the brand, and brand positioning refers to a unique position that the brand wants to establish in the minds of consumers. Luxury brands should select celebrities according to their own positioning. Different celebrities have different effects. The influence of international stars and some niche stars is obviously different. These influences can help brands position themselves more accurately.

### **4.2. Enhance Brand Tonality**

Secondly, the correct use of celebrity effect can also enhance the tonality of luxury brands themselves. People's positive impression of celebrities themselves can be transferred to luxury brands through endorsement, which integrates with the original image of the brand and finally evolves and upgrades, strengthening the tonality of the brand. The relationship between celebrity effect and brand tonality plays an important role in marketing. Brand tonality refers to the emotion and atmosphere that the brand conveys to the consumer in the market, which is usually reflected by the brand's advertising, packaging, slogan and visual elements. It is very important for establishing brand identity and shaping brand image. Celebrity effect involves associating a celebrity's popularity, influence and image with a brand, thereby enhancing the brand's appeal and credibility. When celebrities partner with a brand, their personal image and attributes can become part of the tonality of the brand. This means that the celebrity effect can impart a certain emotion or atmosphere to the brand, which is consistent with the goal of the brand tonality. For example, if a brand's goal is to project a young, dynamic and innovative image, then it is appropriate to choose a dynamic and innovative celebrity. The image and characteristics of the star can be integrated with the tone of the brand, injecting freshness and vitality into the brand.

### **4.3. Increasing Popularity of the Brand**

Celebrities and brands are mutually beneficial. If celebrities have great influence in the industry, they will bring huge traffic to the brand, thus improving the brand's visibility and bringing economic benefits to the brand. Similarly, cooperation between brands and celebrities will also bring economic benefits and traffic to the celebrity. The value of celebrities comes from their own appearance, personality, social status and other aspects. Different people have different effects. Celebrities help to enhance the public's attention and interest in the brand, so as to improve consumers' cognition of the brand image.

### **4.4. Fan Economy**

"Fan economy" generally refers to the business income-generating behavior based on the relationship between fans and followers, who are traditionally stars, idols and industry celebrities. Willing to buy star albums or VCDS to support their idols. This is also the most basic fan consumption behavior. There are also some fans who buy their favorite stars' albums in bulk to show their love, this is one thing. The second is that fans also buy items that stars endorse or wear on a daily basis,

which can be seen during CAI Xukun's endorsement of PRADA. During the endorsement period, the key chain with the word "KUN" is out of stock. At this time, it is still in the weak period of e-commerce after Double 11. It can be seen that the fan economy should not be underestimated, and the advertising benefits of stars cannot be separated from the support of fans. There are some crazy fans for his endorsement of the products "according to the order" and "blind consumption", which also stimulated the economy in disguised form, forming a deformed consumption concept.

#### **4.5. Negative Effects: Knock-on Effects**

After Cai Xukun fell into "emotional turmoil", many brands have terminated their contracts with him. There are 42 commercial endorsements in various fields, including Pepsi, Ambusch, Prada, Bulgari, L'Oreal, Watsons, Bulgari, HP, Levis, Schwarzburg, Tide, Vinda and other brands. Among them, Nestle China, VIVO, Tide and other brands can no longer search the relevant content of the artist. It caused his reputation to plummet. PRADA could only look for another spokesperson, but it was difficult to find someone like Cai Xukun who could bring more than 700 million exposures to the brand [9].

### **5. Measures to Maximize Celebrity Effect**

Different celebrities bring different influences on the brand. In the process of choosing Internet celebrities, brands need to make reasonable use of them to maximize the positive impact they can bring to the brand. Based on the analysis of previous Prada brand spokespersons, this study puts the following suggestions to help maximize the influence of celebrities:

#### **5.1. Select Celebrities Who Conform to the Overall Tone of the Brand**

Luxury brands and celebrities are like two components of the same machine, complementing each other. Suitable celebrities can help interpret the public image that the brand expects to build through various ways, so as to help improve or build a brand image [10]. So how do brands find the right celebrity?

First, judge the positioning of celebrities. The personality of celebrities can be reflected by the way they dress on social media, the content they post, and the types of events they regularly attend, and so on. Celebrities on social media platforms have many types, such as fashion, sports, fashion, shop exploration, and study. Studies have shown that when the brand credit fit of celebrity brand and product brand reaches the same level, celebrity endorsement strategy is more likely to achieve success [11]. Therefore, only when the celebrity temperament is consistent with the overall tone of the brand, the two can complement each other. When the two do not match, the public's trust in their decisions will be reduced, and the image of celebrities and brands will be damaged to a certain extent. But it's important to note that the right temperament doesn't require the celebrity and the brand to be in the same area. Cooperation in different fields can sometimes have unexpected positive effects.

Second, examine the influence and appeal of a celebrity, including understanding the celebrity's fan base and the target group that a particular characteristic of the celebrity can attract. Fans are the group most directly affected by celebrities. When the fans and potential audience overlap with or are similar to the target group of the brand, they are more likely to actively pay attention to the trend of the brand and buy related brand products. The fan base is also an important element to measure. Top stars and celebrities often have a large fan base, resulting in greater influence and commercial value. But in contrast, business partnerships with top business stars often require more money.

Finally, the celebrity's trustworthiness should also be taken into account. Celebrity trust is divided into two aspects, one is the trust between the celebrity and the brand, and the other is the trust of the celebrity in the audience. By knowing the celebrity's past collaborations experience, brands can have a basic assessment of the extent and outcome of the cooperation. Thus, the brand can predict the process and result of cooperation. At the same time, these experiences can also help the brand to have a basic understanding of the personality characteristics of the celebrity, working style, and to assess

the risk of cooperation in advance. The audience trust of celebrities is generally expressed as whether they are reliable. For example, in China, when it comes to the Chinese women's football team, people generally have a positive association impression such as strength, reliability, confidence, and hard work, and rarely worry about the risk of "house collapse". This shows that the celebrity image of Chinese women's football has a high degree of trust among the audience.

## 5.2. Develop the Functional Uses of Celebrities Creatively

Celebrity marketing has extremely complex and varied strategies. The brand should carry out targeted and creative marketing planning according to a certain image that it wants to build or strengthen and make use of a prominent trait of the celebrity partner. Some mature brands no longer carry out extensive cooperation in celebrity marketing in the early stage but make targeted use of the influence of Internet celebrities at different levels in different circles to carry out different forms of cooperation with them [11]. L'Oreal Paris, for example, partnered with eight niche celebrities to specialize in their respective areas of expertise. [11]

On the one hand, brands need to determine the publicity identity of the celebrities they work with. There are many types of celebrity and brand endorsement roles, including but not limited to brand ambassadors, full-line spokespersons, global spokespersons, and so on. Different publicity identities will have a certain impact on the results. On the other hand, according to the celebrity's own characteristics, preferences and influence, develop personalized publicity elements and ways. The brand can consider whether to hold offline events or to shoot poster videos.

## 5.3. Establish a Risk Prevention Mechanism in Advance

The risk of celebrity endorsement cannot be ignored in marketing, because the career and image of celebrities have a certain instability. If a celebrity is suddenly embroiled in negative news, or their career hits a low point, this can have a negative impact on the brand [12]. In such cases, brands need to take quick steps to mitigate the possible negative consequences of celebrity influence, which may include suspending partnerships with celebrities, issuing public statements, etc. In order to be able to react in a timely manner when similar incidents occur, brands can develop strategies and mechanisms to prevent and respond to risks before working with celebrities.

First, brands can conduct comprehensive due diligence to assess the reputation and stability of potential celebrity endorsers. This includes studying a celebrity's past behavior, social media activity, news coverage, and anything else that may have influenced their image. By fully understanding the celebrity's background and history, brands can better anticipate potential risks.

Secondly, brands can clearly specify in the contract the termination conditions of celebrity endorsement and the liability for breach of contract. These clauses can include termination clauses when the celebrity is involved in misconduct or negative press, as well as corresponding liability.

This helps to protect the equity of the brand and reduce the possible negative impact.

In addition, brands can also consider diversifying the choice of celebrity endorsers to spread the risk. Forging partnerships with multiple celebrities, rather than just relying on one, can keep the brand stable if one celebrity runs into problems.

To sum up, celebrity endorsement has certain risks in marketing, but by developing appropriate risk management strategies, brands can reduce potential negative effects and better protect their own interests. Before establishing a partnership with a celebrity, the brand should develop detailed risk prevention measures to ensure the stability and sustainability of the brand image.

## 6. Conclusion

The research shows that the negative news of celebrities themselves will have different impacts on the image-building strategies of luxury brands according to the severity of the news. In extremely serious cases, it will even prompt the brand to adjust the way and means of building brand image in the future. In order to maximize the celebrity effect of celebrities, luxury brands should choose

celebrities around their own characteristics and communication channels. Moreover, due to the instability of celebrities themselves, brands should not over-rely on celebrities and should formulate corresponding crisis prevention countermeasures in advance.

This study focuses on the objective impact of celebrities' own negative news on the luxury brands associated with them. This will help clarify the correlation between luxury brand image and celebrities, and help brands to view and formulate celebrity marketing in a more comprehensive way.

Finally, there are still some limitations in this study. First, the study did not take into account the diversity of celebrities themselves. Celebrities in different fields have different influence groups, influence and degree of association with brands, and it is difficult to generalize. Specific variables need to be set for targeted studies. Secondly, the study did not fully consider the stability of the inherent impression of luxury brands, that is, the public impression of luxury brands is not able to change dramatically in a single event. In the future, the scope of case studies can be expanded, and variables can be more detailed to facilitate in-depth research on related issues.

## Author Contributions

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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