The Face Management Challenges of Sport Celebrity

Diana-Luiza DUMITRIU

College of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
6 Povernei St., Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, 010643
diana.dumitriu@comunicare.ro

Abstract. *While gaining centrality within the sport field, media accelerated its commodification process and facilitated sport actors becoming competitive on the celebrity market. The aim of this paper is to discuss the reconfiguration that the celebrity logic brought in terms of the mere condition of the sport actor and the face management challenges and remedial strategies that he has to cope with. I will thus focus on two main dimensions that I find to be constitutive for the celebrity status: one related to the augmented media exposure that sport stars are subject to and to the corollary symbolic reconfiguration of the boundaries between his public and his private life, and the second one related to the vulnerability that comes along with the new visibility of the complex repertoire of identities and social roles performed by the sport actors. Within this last dimension of the sport-related celebrity cycle of promotion, I will lay stress not only on the face threatening aspects for the sport stars, but also on the vulnerability transfer within the affinal branding network and the challenges it could bring for the brands that chose to associate their image with a sport celebrity. Thus, I argue that the kaleidoscopic public figures of sport celebrities requires high impression management involvement on their part, as well as more caution on the marketeers part.*

Keywords: sport celebrity, face management, public-private life, affinal branding network, repertoire of identities.

Introduction

Due to the increasing role that the entertainment industries play within the general social dynamics, popular culture seems to have reached its spectacularity climax. Public exposure and the new imagery of the society of spectacle (Debord, 1994) conquered most social fields, attesting to the structuring effect exerted by media upon the cultural fields of production (Bourdieu, 1996, p.64) and, moreover, to the consolidation of a highly media-centric society (Vătămănescu, Andrei, Leovaridis & Dumitriu, 2015). While enforcing their complicity in the wide-scale addiction for entertainment that people are coping with, media ended up facilitated the

rise of the celebrity culture and its snowball effect. This phenomena is now translated not only into a media landscape animated by celebrities and celebrity-related issues that our day to day discussions bring to the fore, but also into a growing research interest in the celebrity culture (e.g. van Krieken, 2012; Rein et al., 1997; Rojek, 2001, 2012).

The media penetration of celebrity-related topics follows a "make noise–make news–make change" model (Thrall et al., 2008, p.363), within which dramatization, spectacularity and personalization converge in providing the general framework for the dominant media discourses. Moreover, beyond fulfilling the entertainment needs of today's society, where everyone seems to be involved in either producing or consuming celebrities (Rein, Kotler & Stoller, 1997), media uses fame as an amplifier of both the inspirational and the aspirational power of these public figures that are crowned with the celebrity status. Celebrity culture is mainly about (super) stars, V.I.P.'s, idols, and contemporary heroes and their exciting stories, appealing rather to emotionality than to rationality, and building on the celebrities' power to connect and to engage people in different forms of consumption, whether we speak about media consumption or other celebrity-related products and services.

Sport entering the celebrity market was facilitated by media gaining centrality (Whannel, 1992) within this social field, as it brought along a significant transformation of the entire sport ethos. On the one hand, media placed sport under the *commodification radar*, contributing to the emergence and diversification of sport-related products and markets, while, on the other hand, they provided high public visibility for both sport actors and events, setting the grounds for a wider phenomena of social re-contextualization and instrumentalization that the sport imagery was subject to. Moreover, the mere popularity of sport among such wide and heterogeneous audiences covers not only the entertainment component embedded in sport performances, but also the symbolic capital of sport acts in terms of "identity and identification" (Dunning, 1999).

Consistent with the dynamics of popular culture, which has become more and more "influential in arenas of social and political life beyond the realm of entertainment/leisure" (Grindstaff, 2008, p.207), sport is now a constant presence on the public agenda. However, the civic component embedded in sport acts and sport-related topics is still far less prominent than the commercial nature of sport, which made its way up to what can be

analogically called the *commercial agenda*. Acting within the media logic, sport was hence caught up in the same primacy of audience framework, which attests to the domination of the market logic within the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1996, p.29). The constant "interconnections between sport, the media and advertising have helped to create the impression that the pivotal social and personal experience of the modern age is to be a consumer" (Craig & Beedie, 2008, p.130), even when sport experiences are at stake. Therefore, it can be argued that the commercial common grounds that sport and media have built their successful joint–venture (Dumitriu, 2014) on brought along a reconfiguration of both the content of sport performances as products on the entertainment market, as well as a new form of sport experience redefined in terms of consumer experience.

Within this general context of the increasing visibility and "cultural centrality" (Malcom, 2008) of sport in a celebrity-saturated world (Rein et al., 1997, Beer & Burrows, 2013), this paper addresses the challenges that the celebrity status brings in terms of sport actors' *face management* (Goffman 1967, 1971). What can sport actors win or lose when undergoing their transition from public figures to celebrities? How can the changes that come along with the walk of fame be managed and even leveraged on? In discussing these aspects I will focus on the vulnerability triggers of the celebrity status and their face threatening potential for the sport actors. However, I will not only analyze them in relation with the public image of sport actors, but also in terms of the impact they might have on brands that use or intend to use sport actors as endorsers. In other words, what do marketeers should be prepared for when deciding to associate a sport celebrity with their brand and how transferable are the sport actors' face management threats for the brands that these celebrities are associated with?

Before narrowing down the discussion on face management vulnerabilities that sport actors have to cope with, I will start by setting down the general framework of the celebrity culture in terms of media practices and their impact on the sport experience. The paper will then focus on two main challenges that sport actors are facing once entering the celebrity market: the augmented public exposure that they are subject to and how this redefines the private life-public life boundaries, as well as the complex repertoire of identities of sport celebrities. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the face management approach of sport celebrity will cover

both marketing and public relations components, building on the premises of a strong interdependency relation between the commercial and the reputational capital of sport actors.

The complicity of media in placing sport actors' under the celebrity radar

The media culture have gained a central role in today's society, acting as the main framework of meaning making processes and wide-scale engagement. Moreover, it redefined social practices and imageries, providing prominence to the consumer role of the individual (Andrei & Dumea, 2011) and, hence, contributing to the overall dynamics of the market. It is within this general context that the media-sport nexus went from a "marriage of convenience" (Lever & Wheeler, 1993, p.130), build on the instrumental grounds of a commercial *win-win* relationship, to a more complex hybridization processed. This ended up generating new commercial fields within which the customer experience is highly embedded in the spectatorship one. Nevertheless, "the new cultural visibility of sport stimulated a rapid growth in sport-branded merchandising" (Whannel, 2009, p.206), making sport actors and events work as highly marketable commodities.

While media benefit from the popularity and wide-scale addressability of sport, the latter turns to media for increasing the mediated accessibility to sport events and actors and, thus, reaching up and engaging the distant publics. However, media and sport are part of a more dynamic and complex cycle of promotion, as the long "honeymoon had begun for *the ménage á trois* among owners, broadcasters and advertisers" (Lever & Wheeler, 1993, p.130). From banners that wrap up the sport field, to the logos that are crammed on athletes' outfits or the time-outs ads played on big screens within the stadium, sport events work as a collage of competition, advertising and entertainment. Fans are no longer the romantic supporters, but act rather as pragmatic consumers who are aware of their key-role in this sport-related circle of promotion.

The media logic and the commodification process that seem to have gained centrality within the sport field accelerated the sport actors entrance on the celebrity market. The law of public visibility and high spectacularity rules at every level of sport dynamics, but it reaches its climax when sport-related

topics are placed within the celebrity framework. Hence, there is no surprise that the public visibility has become a constant success indicator for both sport actors and events, covering not only content-related issues of this visibility, but also time-frame and consistency ones.

Joining their forces, media and sport are constantly involved in providing attractive shows with high potential of becoming media events and in identifying or co-creating *sport stars*. Capitalizing on the symbolic value of sport and on the fact that it works as a "natural source of prestige" (Allison & Monnington, 2005, p.9), media and marketing actors understood that this can be a resourceful field for the celebrity market (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Jackson & Andrews, 2005; Ogden & Rosen, 2010; Smart, 2005). However, celebrity is not just about sport achievements, but rather "it is constituted discursively, by the way in which the individual is represented" (Turner, Bonner & Marshall, 2000, p.11) by the media. Therefore, achievements on the field should be rather seen as a good start for what can become a spectacular *walk of fame*, providing the favorable premises for media to turn sport actors into genuine celebrity offspring.

These public figures are as competitive on the sport field, as they are on the celebrity market. Moreover, sport personalities such as Serena Williams, Cristiano Ronaldo, Michael Jordan, Usain Bolt or Nadia Comăneci have become a brand in their own right, providing us with a whole social imagery revolving around their global superstar status. Being both a globalizing and a globalized phenomena, sport "introduces and promotes new heroes; individuals whose triumphs are appreciated and assessed on a global scale" (Gammon, 2014, p.247). We are all connected to this globally-shared sport celebrities' galleries that give rise not only to fan communities, but also to commercial ones. The chains of attraction build around the sport stars are enforced by the media, which act as cultural intermediaries (Rojek, 2001), as well as commercial mediators.

The moment they step into the spotlight, sport actors find themselves subject to public scrutiny and feel that their performance on the field is no longer enough to fulfill the public's high expectations. And this is when becoming a good actor turns out to be as important as, or even more important than, being a good athlete/coach in order to remain on the fame radar. This golden aura of celebrity comes along with constraining social expectations and moral responsibility to behave as role model or hero, both within and without the sport field. People relate to sport actors in an

inspirational or aspirational way, but, inevitably, they relate to them in an evaluative way. Once on the celebrity market, public exposure is no longer much of a choice, as it is the mere condition of the celebrity status. This, in turn, is translated into a significant pressure for understanding the benefits and costs of impression management in coping with the face threatening nature of celebrity.

Nevertheless, no battle can be won on the fame battlefield without the complicity of media, as the "celebrity as role model is both made and undone by press and television coverage" (Smart, 2005, p.8). Celebrity is a media construct build on consistent commercial grounds, addressing the wide-shared need for entertainment and identification. Moreover, it is defined by a dynamic and engaging way of fuelling eye-caching topics that trigger highly emotional discussions within the public. "The ups and downs of a celebrity career, [...] sporting success and failure, these are the kinds of topics that usually generate widespread passion and disputation" (McGuigan, 2010, p.10), winning both audiences and marketeers' attention.

As attractive as it is, the celebrity status of sport actors brings to the fore an important *role-play dilemma*: how to match the glamorous celebrity lifestyle with the restrains and moderation required for sport top-performances? Up to a point, they can help one another, but this circular mechanism of performance in and outside the sport field is very vulnerable to dysfunctions when fame ends up taking the lion part and sport actors find themselves performing better on the celebrity field than on the sport one. Is media helping or making this even harder for sport actor to cope with?

Impression management (Goffman, 2003/ [1959]) can work as a resourceful conceptual framework in addressing the domino effect of celebrity upon the sport actors' public image. However, as important as the content of the face management strategies is, I argue that identifying what are the main face threatening aspects of sport celebrity works as a forgoing stage that can condition their success. In the next section I will thus focus on two constitutive face threatening components embedded in the sport celebrity status: the transformative effect of the public exposure upon the public life-private life boundaries and the complex repertoire of identities that sport actors have to cope with while being under the spotlight. Both of them rely on the media-centric nature of sport celebrity and build on the concept of sport celebrity as an outcome of the media-sport "complicit, mutually dependent commercial relationship" (Nicholson, 2007, p.208).

Reshaping the public life - private life boundaries within the celebrity logic

One main effect brought out by increasing the mediated accessibility to the sport events and actors, and augmenting the public exposure embedded in the celebrity status is the dynamic process of redefining the boundaries between sport stars' public and private life. Once entering the celebrity radar, sport actors face a constant media chase for unrevealing aspects that go beyond the sport performance itself. What happens outside the field become as important as what happens on the field, and, thus, sport actors find themselves object to a wider tabloidization approach that defines media's positioning and corollary discourse towards their activity.

News about sport achievements and events leave room for those about parties, conjugal disputes, love affairs or digging up into the childhood issues of sport actors. These, in turn, leads to various forms of pseudo-events, which are "made for and by media" (Sartori, 2005, p.65) and pseudo-celebrities like athletes' wives, brothers, ex-girlfriends or drivers who end up becoming public figure themselves, enjoying a sort of free pass under the spotlights. In terms of media coverage and attractiveness, news regarding sport actors' private life end up competing with those regarding their public performances on the sport field, thus, converting private aspects into objects for public debate. Building on this wide-shared appeal of celebrity and the general framework of today's "confessional society" (Beer, 2008), unrevealing private life aspects becomes a consistent part of the media-sport nexus. But how gains and what gains from this hypervisibility and transparency (Baudrillard, 1997) of sport stars' public and private life?

Media find sport actors' private life to be a resourceful input for adding more drama and spectacularity to the sport performance on the field, making it more entertaining and controversial and thus, providing new chains of attraction and engagement for wider audiences. By modifying the boundaries of perception (Goffman, 2003, p.131) and the public visibility of sport-related regions of performance (front stage, back stage, zone of transition, residual region), media redefine the whole sport experience, for both sport actors and audiences.

Turning to disclosure strategies, media bring salient aspects of sport celebrities' life into the open and end up manipulating the public-private

mapping. This, in turn, triggers the interest of wide-scale audiences, which feel that they are provided with something that was otherwise forbidden to their view and knowledge (Vătămănescu & Pană, 2010). While staging their inopportune intrusion into a space that was supposed to be close for their scrutiny, media increase the audiences' proximity towards sport actors, enriching the spectatorship experience. To some extent, this increased accessibility comes along with a feeling of power that the audiences are provided with in relation to the sport actors. Moreover, this symbolic gain of power is exerting through this Big Brother monitoring of sport actors' activity in and outside the field.

Nevertheless, in this augmented equation of public exposure, it is not the sport actor who gets to decide where the line between his private and his public life is, but rather it is up to media to decide to what extent this private-public reconfiguration can go. Sport and media actors are involved in a constant negotiation of the boundaries between what is public and what is private, the first ones calling for their right to privacy, while the others appealing to the public exposure as constitutive condition of the celebrity status. We have already addressed some of the main media commercial and audience-related gains, which are strongly connected to the enriched spectatorship experience and entertaining gains for the audience part. But what about the other two parties within the sport-related promotion cycle? To what extent is this public-private reconfiguration beneficial for the sport actors? What are the marketing implication of this high media exposure of the sport celebrities' private lives?

Celebrity is fueled by the mere public exposure and bringing the sport actors' private life into the spotlights serves this purpose, becoming an alternative resource for public visibility. When sport performance can no longer buy you media converge, your private life can do that instead, keeping you under the celebrity radar and securing your competitive advantage in terms of commercial gains (i.e. sponsorships, marketing deals, media projects etc.). Moreover, many would argue that these private-life aspects humanize sport celebrities and bring them closer to their publics, which find it easier to identify with them. At first glance, it seems that everyone is winning: media, fans, sport stars and companies they "sell" for. How does the public exposure go from a latent face threatening condition to a manifest one?

I would argue that converting private aspects of the sport celebrities' life into public ones works rather as a Pandora box than a "golden goose", and this is mainly because the process is out of sport actors' control. In other words, the lack of control brought out by such high media exposure can be translated in terms of high face management vulnerability. If the inconsistency between the image that sport stars have build and projected on the public stage and their actual performances in private contexts is high, than this can turn into a harmful boomerang effect of celebrity. Moreover, the media framing of stars' performances in and outside the sport field is usually build on controversial and conflictive principles, as they serve the spectacularity and dramatizing function of the neo-media discourses (Casetti & Odin, 1990). Thus, improper behavior or language, personal preference in clothing, music or travel destinations, hobbies, friends or family history can become significantly face threatening for sport celebrities, as people usually project into them socially desirable values and role-models.

When and if these expectations are not met or, more important, if there is an significant cognitive dissonance between the public image that sport actors' intend to project and the one reflected through the private-life aspects that are revealed by the media, people feel not only disappointed, but also fooled. Moreover, media are always there "to encompass the athlete's betrayal of the public's trust and the fans' emotional investments" (Ogden & Rosen, 2010, p.3), digging for or laying stress on these type of situations. When subject to constant public exposure, the odds of this discrepancy between private and public roles to appear are very high, as people are less involved in a strategic impression management control within the private sphere. However, this can become a turning point in terms of public image evolution, where reputational crisis may emerge (e.g. Tiger Woods infidelity story, Adrian Mutu's drug problem) and where remedial face management strategies are required in order to save the public face of the sport actor (Goffman, 1967).

There is also the problem of the balance between the professional versus the personal media coverage. While, at first, there is a consistent demand for more information about a rising sport star from the audiences' part, the high level of media exposure usually leads to a *supra-saturation point*. This comes with a resistance position among the audiences, as they feel like there is a significant discrepancy between news about the sport celebrities' performances in and outside the sport field. Here is when people start to

question the professional value of sport actors. This, in turn, can lead to both addressing their celebrity status legitimation, as well as to engaging in a social criticism of sport actors more prominent presence in the showbiz-performances than in their professional sport careers. Sport actors' *omnipresence* on the screen, at parties, events or in advertising campaigns is perceived as a proof of neglecting their sport career and, to some extent, as a way of falling into the fame-sin, which are both face threatening.

Moreover, the high media exposure of private aspects may bring to the fore the glamorous nature of their life style and the significant discrepancy between their social status before and after their celebrity rise, as well as between them and most of their fans. This minimizes the mere identification mechanism that fuels the sport actors' appeal, making it harder for people to connect to them anymore. From genuine envy to moral problematization of sport celebrities' extravagances and opulence, revealing too much about the private life of sport celebrities might bring more harm than benefits for their public image. Nevertheless, these are all dependent on the media position and the way they frame or provide visibility to certain aspects from the sport celebrities' private life.

I would also want to argue that this effect of the media exposure upon sport celebrities has lately been amplified by the sport actors' own presence in social media, which are mainly used as Krieger observes for self-disclosure (cited in Frederick et al., 2012). While, on the one hand, they definitely allowed for a higher interaction between athletes and their fans (Sanderson, 2010), on the other hand, they ended up providing a new way to convert private aspects into public ones. Although they work as a great source for traditional media to get access to sport celebrities' private life and contribute to the overall increase of sport tabloidization, social media manage to bring together two apparently conflicting aspects. The first one refers to the fact that the official social media channels of sport celebrities are a more controllable way of revealing private aspects. The second one brings into discussion the audiences-generated context and the rise in civic journalist practices that add another layer to the classic media chase and scrutiny practices. Therefore, I think that the role of social media in the overall reconfiguration of the public-private life boundaries of celebrities can provide a resourceful path for bringing both the theoretical, as well as the empirical research further.

In the end of this section I will lay stress on the fact that marketeers who chose to capitalize on the celebrity status of sport actors in brand communication should be very cautious to this public life-private life dynamics, as the face threatening nature of media exposure of private life aspects transfers the vulnerability of the sport actors' image to the brands they are associated with. Thus, as higher the idealization process of the sport star figure, as higher the boomerang effect of the discrepancy between the promoted image and the elements from the private life that are revealed by the media could be. There is also the mere discrepancy between the role played on the commercial stage and the real life consumer behavior of the sport actor himself. How effective is then an ad if it is well know that the sport actor uses or even is a loyal customer of other competitor brand? Brand endorsement relies on a powerful emotional connection with the consumers an implicit honesty assumption in terms of the promoted values that the brand endorser advocates for. Braking this equation makes people transfer the disappointment and criticism of the pure commercial (pro-profit) versatility from the sport celebrity to the brands that he is associated with and which promote a deceitful image of him.

Managing the celebrity status as (in)consistent repertoire of roles and identities

Due to the symbolic value attached to sports, "questions of identity and identification are of critical importance both for the routine functioning of sports and for some of the problems recurrently generated in connection with them" (Dunning, 1999, p.3), such as the marketing ones. Nevertheless, this identity-identification dyad that defines the sport experience serves as a solid premise for sport's successful adaptation to the consumer culture, in which consumption is understood as "an activity in and through which identity is constructed" (Smart, 2003, p.74).

Although it relays on the professional role and performances of the sport actors, celebrity is not only about this, as it addresses his complex repertoire of identities and the wide range of communities he belongs and connects. From national, to regional or organizational (sport club) identification, the sport celebrities work as community coagulator agents, and thus as a resourceful "relationship marketing catalyst" (Magnusen, Kim & Kim, 2012). All these overlapping communities that the sport celebrities keep together mean not only fanatic supporters or rather silent ones, but also loyal, occasional or potential customers. Therefore, the sport

communities build around these sport stars can be converted into customer-communities and be targeted as such by companies. But how stable and homogenous are these sport celebrity-based communities?

I will further argue that the public exposure that sport celebrities are subject to provides visibility for multiple identities and social roles performed by sport celebrities - besides the professional one within the sport field. Moreover, this visibility can become a face threatening source, as it makes it easier for audiences to compare and connect different identities and roles, and to discuss the role-conflicts or the inconsistency of an actor's public image. As for the sport celebrities, the higher the public exposure, the more difficult will be to cope with the pressure of the image consistency and the more demanding the impression management in terms of both time and energy resources.

When it comes to sport celebrities, their achievements act as important resources for identitary stories and national branding anchors that are globally accepted. The spontaneous association between countries and sport celebrities (ex. Romania - Hagi, Nadia; Russia - Plushenko, Sharapova, Argentina- Maradona, Messi, etc.) attest to the resourceful (para)diplomatic (Manzenreiter, 2010, p.29) and marketing value that they have for their country promotion. The symbolic capital of sport performances is related to a significant affective power, as the competition between nations on the sport battlefield is able "to arouse strong emotions in a direct manner and, in a less direct way, to create a sense of belonging and national pride" (Hilvoorde, Elling & Stokvis, 2010, p.92). It is thus not surprising that most sport-related communication campaigns focus on emotional arguments, but most of all on pride and the feeling of belonging to a (national) community. Moreover, sport actors are invested with both the right, as well as the duty to play for an entire nation, while international competitions give "nations a chance to show their power through sports and give people a chance to feel proud of their nation" (Li et al. 2010, p.128).

Nevertheless, the evolution of the sport market as global labor market and the rising phenomenon of the "citizenship of convenience" (Campbell, 2011), which is triggered by pragmatic financial reasons, made the sport-identity issues related not only to the national identity, but also to the organizational one (the sport club's identity). This is very important for sport-teams, as the market of sport clubs' brands is extremely competitive, making them act as transnational organization, gathering and competing for

the best sport actors, irrespective of their national identity. Performance and commercial reasons have become more important than national or spatial criteria, as both clubs and individual sport actors are interested in becoming more and more competitive and achieving greater results. This enhances their win-win relation, as they aim at capitalizing on each other's symbolic and commercial potential. It is thus not surprising that we have multinational teams, even up to the point when teams like Manchester City Football Club or Hypo Handball Club have fewer English/ Austrian players than foreigners. But what are the effects of this phenomenon in terms on the promotional cycle?

Sport actors are faced with a dynamic reconfiguration in terms of dominant and secondary or latent identities, depending on the context of their actual performance. For example, the national community identification becomes salient when Real Madrid meets Barcelona, as people define themselves firstly by referring to their club community, which is transnational and, moreover, primary about shared emotions and common competitive interests. However, the same player could relate to its club community on the National Championship stage and to its national community during a World Championship, where he may find himself competing against its club team mates, who are part of their countries' teams. This requires sport actors, as well as supporters, to activate a certain community-identification mechanisms, while making the other identities silent.

These alternative and context-dependent changes between active and passive identities work even harder when different social roles of sport celebrities are at stake, especially when they come from the private-life sphere. A successful sport actor can play also the father, the child, the friend, the lover, the fan or the consumer role and, while he wants to make them more silent in comparison to his professional role, media works towards making them more visible, up to the point where they compete with the professional one and affect the consistency of the sport actors' public image. There is no wonder that sport stars feel frustrated and embarrassed when, during a sport conference, they are more and more often asked to comment some private-life issues instead of their performances on the field.

However, in terms of marketing implications, besides the already discussed vulnerability that might be triggered by role-conflicts or image inconsistency, these alternative forms of identifications could also mean

distinct markets and public targets, working as segmentation platforms for companies' campaigns. Moreover, they provide a widening of the potential customers' pool, as using Cristiano Ronaldo as brand endorser means addressing both Portuguese community, as well as Real Madrid community or football fans in general as professional community. It is hence no surprise that he is the second *World' s Highest-Paid Athletes* in 2014, according to Forbes (Badenhausen, 2014), having 11 endorsement major partners like Emirates, Nike, Samsung Electronics and Toyota Motor that generate $28 million a year in income and one of the biggest social media network-community, with 83 million Facebook fans and 26 million Twitter followers.

However, the real problems in terms of face management and marketing consequences begin when sport celebrities switch teams, especially well known rivals like Real Madrid and Barcelona (football) or Györi Audi ETO KC and Larvik (handball). Both clubs and sport actors as brands are losing followers, while marketeers have to find out the proper strategy to benefit from these fan-community reconfigurations. Moreover, sport actors have to cope with contradictory situations generated by the globalizing stage of sport; for example FC Barcelona's hero (Messi) is not a Spanish football player although FC Barcelona is one of the most powerful Spanish brands, becoming, in march 2014, the first sport team to have reached 50 million Facebook fans and being valued at $2.6 billion, almost double what the team was worth in 2012 (Ozanian, 2014).

Another multiple identity construct that sport actors are object to emerge on the mere commercial grounds of their celebrity status. Along with pop-stars, sport celebrities are among the most wanted brand ambassador, enjoying their "spoilt offspring of advertising" position. They are not only brands in their own, but, most of all, they act as *brand-bonds*, connecting a wide and, sometimes very heterogeneous, set of brands. From clothes and wine, to cars or banking services, sport actors are engaged in promoting almost any kind of product, service or social cause you can think of. Unfortunately, despite the commercial gains and high public exposure, this branding network build around a sport actor brings along an additional source of vulnerability in terms of face management.

Each of the brands that sport celebrities are related to requires a specific role-play on his part, in agreement with the brand values and the ad-hoc marketing approach, as well as with the sport actor's personal branding concept. Yet, the wider and diversified the brand-association portfolio of a sport actor, the higher the face threatening pressure he has to cope with

and the higher the risks that each brand associated with him has to run. The celebrity capital of a sport actor usually favors the configuration of a more complex form of what I call *affinal[1] branding network* build around him, although it is also true that it allows the sport actor to be more selective in choosing the brands it wants to associate its image with.

If sport actors (and their PR staff) are interested if and to what extent a certain product, service, company or cause is compatible with his brand image and what risks they expose themselves to when enlarging the affinal branding network built around them, the marketeers should also consider if the other products the sport actor promotes are a proper *branding peer group* to be associated with by the public. This is because image transfer works not only between the sport actor and the brand, but could also work between the brands that the sport celebrities indirectly connect. Does my brand rather benefit or stand to lose from this mediated association with a certain soft drink brand or face-cream brand the sport actor endorses?

Brought together by the same sport actor, brands should take a more cautious approach of the implications of this affinal branding association mechanism, anticipate and prevent potential crisis generated by brand value inconsistency. What might happen when the same sport celebrity who enjoys fast-food products on TV ads and billboards is also engaged in a social campaign promoting a healthier food-style? How can a luxury perfume brand work with been associated with the same sport actor as a mainstream face-cream brand? It is thus important to understand consumers behavior, as using sport in advertising, mainly addresses issues of customers' "identification and differentiation" (Lyberger & McCarthy, 2001, p.431).

The complex repertoire of identities and social roles of sport celebrities, which are made visible by the constant media exposure that they are subject to, brings along important challenges for all the actors involved in the sport-related cycle of promotion. This requires a consistent concern for impression management and remedial face strategies on the sport actor's part, as well as a deeper understanding and cautious approach from marketeers when deciding if and what sport celebrity to choose as endorser, giving the affinal branding network he is part of. Thus, weather this is a matter of selection or a matter of how permissive are the contractual requirements, marketeers can minimize the vulnerability of a brand by addressing and properly managing this potential transfer of

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[1] *affinal* relates to a form of commercial affinity connection and compatibility provided by the sport celebrity as the central node of this network of brands

negative image problems that can emerge within the affinal branding network build around a sport celebrity.

Conclusion

Within the general framework of a media-centric and celebrity-saturated society, this paper addresses some of the main challenges brought out by sport entering the celebrity market in terms of the condition of the sport actor and the corollary process of impression management. Contrary to the celebrity magnetism that Holt and Mangan admit when claiming that sporting public is too busy worshipping to reflect on the objects of its fascination (Holt & Mangan, 1996, p.5), I will argue that we are rather facing a time when the spectatorship experience has become more evaluative and the augmented media exposure of sport actors converge in making the celebrity status highly face threatening for the sport actors.

Through providing both accessibility to sport actors and their performances, as well as engaging in a symbolic fostering of sport celebrities, media reconfigured the public life-private life boundaries and made the multiple identities and roles of sport actors more visible. This, in turn, lead to transforming sport celebrities into some kind of *kaleidoscopic public figures* that anchor their fame into sport achievements, but go far beyond it in order to keep themselves in the foreground. The kaleidoscopic profile of sport stars reflects the changing public images that a sport actor is related to on the celebrity stage and his complex repertoires of identities and roles. These alternative, and, as we have seen, even competitive multiple reflections of the same public figure, are enhanced by his celebrity status and require a good impression management. Nevertheless, the sport celebrity status comes along with a high face threatening potential, transferring this vulnerability from the sport actors to other brands that they are associated with in the wider cycle of promotion.

In this context, I have laid stress on the fact that celebrity *gains* and *loses* equation is as important in discussing the sport-media nexus, as well as it is in discussing the relation between the sport star as brand endorser and the brands he is associated with. I argue that if media actors-sport actors' relationship is defined by a constant symbolic negotiation of what and to what extent is reveled, thus bringing a dynamic reconfiguration of the boundaries between the public and the private life, the relation between sport celebrities and brands rises questions of vulnerability transfer within the complex affinal branding network build around sport stars and of the (in)consistency of their repertoire of identities and social roles.

All things considered, despite the high vulnerability that comes along with the celebrity status, this is as much about face threatening aspects and remedial face management strategies as it is about opportunities to leverage the celebrity capital. Further discussion should thus address this complementary component of celebrity-related impression management, focusing more on the strategic use of sport celebrity and different forms of its instrumentalization that are or could be engage by all the parties involved in the wider sport-related cycle of promotion (media actors, audiences, sport actors, marketeers etc.)

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