Celebrity Endorsement is Beneficial in Raising Awareness for Social Issues

How the HeForShe Campaign Demonstrates Celebrity Leverage over the Public

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Celebrities often take over our daily lives in the form of gossip magazines, television shows and movies. Anyone has the power to follow their favorite celebrities’ lives through social media outlets; therefore, what a certain celebrity has to say is always on record. Social media plays a central role in this communication exchange between the general public and their idolized figures. It also plays a crucial role in expanding awareness for major causes.

For instance, the popular “Ice Bucket Challenge” relied on social engagement in order to spread awareness about Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. One individual would be nominated by another person to pour a bucket of ice over their head and be encouraged to donate to the association as well. They would then nominate several other people to do the same. Soon enough, the Ice Bucket Challenge was evident among various media platforms; videos on Facebook, pictures on Instagram, and headlines in local newspapers. Additionally, celebrities began participating and nominating others among them to complete the challenge too. Rihanna, Taylor Swift, Lady Gaga, and Justin Timberlake are just a few of the common faces who completed the challenge and encouraged the public and other socialites to not only do the same but donate as well (Holmes, 2014). With the aid of celebrities, the Ice Bucket Challenge became a trend. According to the ALS Association, they collected over $115 million in donations since Sept. 2014 (“ALS Ice Bucket Challenge”).

Celebrities could be using their personal social media outlets to their advantage in order to increase awareness and or financially benefit non-profit organizations. The outreach to grand audiences and the influence they have over the general public increases their ability to successfully campaign and bring necessary attention to affairs that either affect others in negative ways or aid many in positive ways. Specifically, the HeForShe gender equality campaign, most
commonly associated with the actress Emma Watson, demonstrates how the effective and constructive use of social media by celebrities can aid and raise awareness for significant issues.

**Literature Review**

A celebrity is defined as “someone who is famous, especially in the entertainment business” (“Definition of”). The term celebrity has evolved into an adjective rather than just a noun, indicating that someone possesses the quality of attracting attention (Furedi, 2010). Prior to the twentieth century actors and actresses were rarely acknowledged for their roles, as motion pictures did not include a cast list nor were actors viewed as unique individuals beyond the roles they played in films (Turner, 2004). The transformation in celebrity appeal is a result of mass media incorporating these individuals in the headlines while also incorporating significant news into gossip media.

**Celebrity Culture in the United States**

Celebrity culture today is successful in transforming the powerful and the well-known into intimate figures (Furedi, 2010). As a result, celebrities serve as a type of role model in which they become an object of imitation. Although they do not have superior qualities like the term ‘role model’ entails, their authority is within the point of reference to others for expressive behavior (Furedi, 2010). As a result, respective fans tend to identify with these idolized individuals, absorbing what they believe in or do as a way of identifying their personal selves. Furthermore, fandoms are created among individuals who admire a particular celebrity. Fandom involves the search for the authentic person that remains behind the manufactured mask of fame (Holmes & Redmond, 2006). This intimate world of their personal identities can be viewed with the use of technology like social media, where celebrities’ personalities are seen aside from their
prominent roles in the entertainment business as mere characters. Celebrity culture, therefore, is a phenomenon in which average people seek to see celebrities as normal people as well.

In modern society, Americans hear about world political information from “soft-news” outlets such as *Entertainment Tonight, Access Hollywood, The View, People* and *US Weekly* magazines, *The Daily Show, The Tonight Show,* etc. (Drezner, 2007). Soft news refers to news that entertains and are of interest to the general public whereas hard news are covering events as they are occurring (Mills-Brown, 2014). Older generations would likely receive information from standard media outlets such as newspapers, radio, or a nightly news casting from one network. Today there are numerous media outlets that Americans can rely on for world news. Hence, these numerous soft-news outlets have transformed into an acceptable way of providing information to the public while also providing entertainment via celebrity status. The power of soft news has given entertainers more leverage to advance the causes they care about and often progress the urgency and need for political administration to take action (Drezner, 2007). Celebrities can and should use their influence and leverage in society to discuss and raise awareness about certain social issues and causes since their culture is becoming the forefront of discussion.

**Psychology of Celebrity Appeal**

In a society where there are endless news and people, “the best targets for gossip are the faces we all know” (Flora, 2008, p. 35). Celebrities can be viewed as a communal subject, one that everyone is at least familiar with and can talk about. According to evolutionary psychologists, as our brains developed, anyone with a familiar face was an “in-group” member, a person whose associations were important to keep track of (Flora, 2008). This concept can be
applied to celebrities today, they are the “in-group”, many of whom we keep track of for the duration of their entertainment career. We may not know what every celebrity is constantly doing; however, we make attempts to know about their private lives to give us something to talk about in our personal lives. Celebrity gossip offers small talk discussions because it is a subject with familiarity among many. As a result, average people are constituted as an outside group looking to this “in-group” to familiarize and talk about.

In several psychological studies conducted by Henrich and Gil-White, they found that humans have the ability to observe and then mimic complex behaviors, thus creating prestige hierarchies where those with the most worthwhile skills are placed at the top of this hierarchy. As a result others aspire to reach or be as close as possible to such individuals at the top of this hierarchy in order to imitate their qualities (as cited in Choi & Berger, 2009). Thus, each fan may mimic or hold the same opinion and or beliefs as their favorite celebrity, who is in turn using social media to portray these opinions and or beliefs. Not all celebrities are held to the same standard; some may be more noteworthy while others may be lacking valuable skills in the entertainment business, such as a bad reputation for their specific abilities and or qualities. However, each entertainer has their own fan base in which individuals may idolize them to the point of being on top of this hierarchy described.

The general public can reach these hierarchies through social media outlets in order to connect and listen to these well-known individuals. Exchanges that occur across a significant social distance with people ‘we don’t know’ is known as para-social interactions (Turner, 2004). Para-social interactions are occurring when millions of users are connecting with their idolized celebrity via different social media outlets. This is evident when people engage in conversation or attempt to contact the celebrity using their social media account names. Celebrities are
promoted and viewed as role-models who then can engage millions of otherwise disengaged people, thus providing an influential role in education and awareness orientated towards younger generations (Furedi, 2010). Younger generations rely heavily on technology for their everyday needs, including for the most part, communication. Thus, celebrities can use social media to encourage young people to consider and discuss an issue they typically would not think about.

**Celebrities and Advertisement**

Celebrity endorsement is used to enhance the validity and appeal of products to potential consumers. Brand recognition is then connected with these famous people, whom others seek to replicate. Studies of hundreds of endorsements have indicated that sales for brands increased up to 20 percent upon commencing an endorsement deal (Crutchfield, 2010). Furthermore, according to Anita Elberse, associate professor at Harvard Business School, several companies have seen their stock increase by .25 percent on the day a celebrity endorsement deal was announced (as cited in Crutchfield, 2010). The following a celebrity has by fans leads to imitation. If celebrities have this impact on consumer items, they could also promote social issues in ways that benefits the organizations or movements economically and communally.

Julie Ruth, brand strategy and consumer behavior expert and marketing professor at the Rutgers School of Business-Camden, believes celebrities bring attention to charities just as they would a product; by creating image-related associations on the basis of qualities such as attractiveness and likability, expertise, and trustworthiness (Moorhouse, 2013). Fans often feel a sense of intimacy with their favorite superstar, thus they serve as a model of behavior for consumers to mimic while also humanizing the process of advertisement into a setting that does not feel forced.
The relationship between entertainment and advertisement has been studied and analyzed by James Twitchell. Twitchell believes that advertising has become the central institution in American society that shapes cultural influence and importance, as defined by the self-proclaimed term “Adcult” (Conley & Schultz, 2000). Twitchell describes the process of Adcult and link between the two subjects, “After an audience has been gathered, its attention is rented to an agent who inserts a message from a sponsor. The audience pays attention because it is traded something in return, namely, entertainment” (Conley & Schultz, 2008, p. 60). The advertisement industry manipulates entertainers to a position of authority resulting in initial audience entertainment but also audience duplication, as proved by the previously mentioned statistics.

Well-known figures represent these certain brands, or in this case representing certain social causes and or non-profit organizations, to serve as a symbol in which consumers identify with. Thus, celebrities create an association between their status and their respective brand, cause or organization onto their audience.

**Emma Watson**

Emma Watson’s leverage in the media and positive reputation supported the fact that she was the initial and central spokesperson for the campaign. Watson is most commonly known for her role as Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* movie series, a role she began at the age of 10 years old. She performed in all eight of the movies from 2009-2011 and literally grew up in front of the eyes of America. She continued acting and starred in several well-known films including *The Tale of Despereaux, The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and more recently *Beauty and the Beast*. Not only did she remain well-known for her acting abilities, she remained well-known for her personality off screen.
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Watson remained in the acting business while also attending college and earning a bachelor’s degree in English from Brown University in May 2014 (“Emma Watson Biography”). She received several distinguished awards recognizing her talents including: the Calvin Klein Emerging Star Award in 2012, Trailblazer Award at the MTV Movie Awards and GQ Woman of the Year Award both in 2013.

Her social media presence is also highly recognizable. She currently has 20.1 million followers on Twitter, more than 31 million likes on her Facebook page and 4.9 million followers on Instagram.

Social Movement

Social movements are described as an “organized yet informal social entities that are engaged in extra-institutional conflict that is orientated towards a goal. These goals can be either aimed at a specific and narrow policy or be more broadly aimed at cultural change” (Christiansen, 2009, p. 2). Social movements typically involve a process of gathering or assembling a group of individuals around a commonly shared subject, or a common identity (Gerbaudo, 2012). The impact of the media on social movements has allowed for more flexible relationships, in which individuals can cooperate without the need for central coordination or a physical display of their unity (Gerbaudo, 2012). Social media can aid in the mobilization of thoughts and action plans. Thus, people that share a common passion can be supportive and proactive from all over the world. Collective action no longer needs to be static, but instead can be progressive, interactive and easily accessible.

Social movements typically occur in four stages: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization and decline. Christiansen (2009) describes these stages in depth: The
emergence stage is characterized by little organization and action with few participants that may be dissatisfied with some type of policy or some social condition. At this stage a social movement organization (SMO) and its members would serve as agitators for the cause. An SMO is associated with a social movement and carries out the tasks necessary to raise awareness around the imminent issue and helps to advance the sense of discontent among the general population. The second stage, coalescence, is what the unease is about and who or what is responsible begins to develop. Leadership and strategies begin to emerge and mass communication is likely to occur with the intention of displaying the social movement’s power and establishing clear demands. Next in the bureaucratization stage, further organization in the form of trained staff is needed to progress toward end goals and carry out the functions of the SMO. The third stage is also characterized by greater political power in the sense that there is access to political elites. The last stage is the decline that can result from repression, co-optation, success, and or failure. These phases are not binding to each social movement, but serve as an understanding of how social movements form, develop, solidify, and decline (Christiansen, 2009).

**HeForShe Campaign**

Emma Watson is a British actress, model and activist who has used her leverage in society to her advantage in promoting a special campaign aimed at diminishing gender inequality. She delivered a momentous speech as the UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on Sept. 20, 2014 that introduced the campaign to the world. Watson ended the speech by introducing the campaign; “We are struggling for a uniting word but the good news is we have a uniting movement. It is called HeForShe. I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen to speak up, to be the "he" for "she". And to ask yourself
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if not me, who? If not now, when?” (“Emma Watson: Gender equality is your issue too”). Within a week more than 100,000 men and boys pledged their commitment to gender equality from almost every country in the world (“UN Women's #HeForShe Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality”). By the end of the first two weeks, there were 1.1 million ‘#HeForShe tweets by more than 750,000 Twitter users (“UN Women’s”).

The HeForShe campaign is a United Nations women solidarity movement for gender equality that seeks to spread awareness and create a momentum for action by men and boys in eliminating all forms of discrimination against women (“HeForShe UN Women”). The desired results of this social movement will promote economic growth, social cohesion and social justice, environmental balance, and further progress in all aspects of life (“HeForShe UN Women”). Available on the HeForShe website is an action kit that provides instructions for implementation of the campaign. There are three different implementation plans that are unique and specialized for certain people to use: UN Women/UN Entities, Individuals & Civil Society Organizations, and Universities/Colleges.

The main goals of the campaign are to inspire people to take action against gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls and to call action from UN entities to develop sustainable, transformative programs for the greatest participation of men and boys in support of gender equality (“HeForShe UN Women”). The campaign’s target audience is not only men, but also women; the campaign is striving for attainment by all individuals. However, the campaign is seeking men to join the solidarity movement in order to show their support and spread the word about gender equality.
The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Miambo-Ngcuka, believed that social media would play a crucial role with advancing the campaign and ending the gender inequality gap (Herman, 2015). The UN Women’s team was well aware that the power of social media and celebrity endorsement would both spark an interest and gain support for the campaign worldwide.

**Methodology**

The HeForShe campaign effectively used celebrity endorsements and social media to influence the importance of gender equality onto the general public. The goal of the campaign was to raise awareness about this social issue among both women and men across the world.

The HeForShe campaign can be evaluated using content analysis. Cole describes content analysis as a method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication messages (as cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Using content analysis as a research method will allow for a systematic and an objective way of describing and quantifying phenomena (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). Weber also concludes that a content analysis can be used “to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention” (as cited in Stemler, 2001).

Analyzation will be applied to the impact of the campaign onto the UN Women’s organization, the celebrity reinforcement, and how the campaign was an effective social movement to diminish gender inequality.

**Results**

A deeper look into the campaign shows it was successful for several reasons. To begin, the introduction to the campaign by Emma Watson on Sept. 20, 2014 at the United Nations
Headquarters in New York was the right place and time to do so. The audience was composed of UN delegates and representatives, all of whom are elected officials as she is. Watson holds the title of the UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador, thus giving her credibility among her peers and the rest of the world. Although none of them may hold her famous reputation, they are respected officials and world leaders who hold high positions in world policy decisions and actions. It would be quite different if she blatantly announced the campaign onto her own terms, however she announced the campaign at an official meeting with professionalism and in great detail about why the campaign was so important to not only her, but why it should also be important to everyone else. The end of her speech was rewarded a standing ovation. Not only was she taken seriously among her peers, Watson was also taken seriously among the world as a result of the setting.

As the speech was broadcasted, recorded, and posted among websites and news stations, the discussion among social media instantly began.

**HeForShe Social Media Increase**

The HeForShe campaign has a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram page. All of their social media outlets increased in the amount of followers within 24 hours after the launch of the campaign. According to Ogilvy PR, the company who worked on the media efforts of the campaign, there was an 82 percent increase in Twitter followers, 305 percent increase in Facebook likes, and a 3,500 percent increase in Instagram followers (Garcia, 2014). Within that small amount of time their social media presence along with awareness about their organization dramatically increased due to an approximate 12 minute speech. Currently, the HeForShe Twitter page has 279,000 followers, 417,300 likes on Facebook, and 84,700 followers on Instagram.
Celebrity Reinforcement

The hashtag, “#HeForShe”, was not only utilized by average individuals, it was also noticed and discussed by fellow celebrities. As noted previously, these celebrities were not asked to speak on behalf of UN Women, but instead personally decided to be a part of the gender equality movement. Furthermore, the fact that male celebrity voices were being published and discussed raised even more awareness about the campaign since each person has their own fan base. The male celebrities that published some type of post with the hashtag “#HeForShe” onto their social media accounts (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) to show their support included: Jared Leto, Eddie Redmayne, Kiefer Sutherland, Harry Styles, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Forest Whitaker, and many more (Hoff, 2014). Their posts included encouragement for their followers to learn more about the campaign with a link to the HeForShe website and to specifically encourage other men to join the movement as well.

HeForShe Social Movement

As previously discussed, social movements tend to occur in four stages: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline (Christiansen, 2009). The HeForShe campaign began in the emergence stage when the UN Women organization stressed the importance of gender equality to the world, thus acting as an agitator. Prior to the announcement, the UN Women team began devising this campaign with the help of Elizabeth Nyamayaro. Nyamayaro, senior advisor to the executive director of UN Women, is responsible for conceiving the idea (Segran, 2015).

The next stage, coalescence, is evident by the clear demands voiced by the UN Women, whom in this case is the SMO and feminist in general: gender equality. The injustices faced by females begin to showcase on media outlets as many women began to realize the blatant
inequalities such as unequal pay rates, unequal representation concerning political positions, violence, and discrimination. According to the World Economic Forum, the gender gap in the workplace will not be terminated until 2095 and the gender equivalence in political representation will take another 50 years (as cited in Biddle, 2015). These numerous inequalities are responsible for the campaign’s initiative and importance.

The HeForShe campaign entered the bureaucratization stage with the speech given by Emma Watson and the effective use of the hashtag ‘#HeForShe’ on social media outlets. Watson introduced the idea, explained the significance behind the campaign, and the anticipated end goals. The trained staff, which composed of UN Women team members and Ogilvy PR, was responsible for the organization and implementation of this specific social movement. The speech was given among political elites of United Nations members from all over the world, another feature of the bureaucratization stage.

Lastly, the campaign entered the decline stage in the form of success. The movement is still in progress with the hopeful end goal of one million men and boys signing the pledge. Although the campaign is still advancing, it was overall successful because of the specific goals and timeline they outlined for the public.

Counterargument

Critics believe that while celebrities may succeed in engaging the public, they do so by diluting the message they are attempting to convey (Kamons, 2007). On the contrary, they are offering a sense of attractiveness and importance to whatever policy or cause they are supporting. Celebs can both bring and spread awareness to larger audiences than a political person whom people may be unfamiliar with.
Discussion

According to the HeForShe website, there are currently 504,889 men worldwide who have committed to the gender equality pledge. The initial goal of mobilizing 100,000 world citizens was met within three days. Their main goal was to engage and have one million men and boys join the movement by July 2015. Although this goal may not have been completed and is still in the process of being achieved, the campaign was still successful. The 1 million men and boys goal may not have been realistic for the scope of the campaign’s deadline of 10 months; however, it did aid in the drive to get individuals involved and join the movement by having such a high end point.

The impact of the campaign onto the HeForShe organization was another successful factor. They now have a stable following and individuals can now keep up to date on the campaign’s current efforts. People are no longer unaware about this organization or about the importance of gender equality. Those who felt passionate about this social issue prior to the campaign’s beginning are no longer alone.

An important aspect to consider is the credibility behind the celebrity endorsers for this campaign and in general. Celebrities with a worthy reputation are more likely to be listened to and taken seriously when supporting a cause or nonprofit organization than a celeb that has a blotchy image to the public. Granted not all celebrities are experts among the topics they may be supporting, however, they can still be the voice that these social issues and or organizations need. Although they can merely stress an issue at hand and not technically solve it, superstars are able to raise the media profile surrounding issues and thus urging politicians to act sooner rather than later (Drezner, 2007).
Conclusion

In conclusion, celebrities should be using their social media outlets as a resource to raise awareness and or funds about special social issues and or nonprofit organizations because of their outreach to grand audiences, their influence, and appeal.

The HeForShe campaign is only one example of how these two areas combined to positively benefit a pressing social issue. The power of influence of celebrities onto the public and the influence of fellow peers made the social media discussion snowball into a successful campaign. Although there is still more work to be done concerning gender equality, the HeForShe campaign was a good start to catapulting the discussion worldwide. The campaign was so successful because of their chief celebrity spokesperson, Emma Watson, and the various other celebrities that used their social media outlets to support the campaign.

As society continues to advance with technology, it is important that individuals progress with this change as well. This change is already evident by younger generations who rely on social media to communicate, hear about world news, and have an open discussion. Social media outlets can be used as a tool by celebrities, who hold a high leverage both financially and socially. Social media can be used in conjunction with celebrity appeal to benefit special causes or nonprofit organizations by raising awareness and or funds.
References


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