



Expertise
and insight
for the future

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How to grow a successful celebrity- focused brand.

Moving beyond conventional branding theory to create brands
that connect with consumers.

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Business Administration

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How to grow a successful celebrity-focused brand.

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| <p>The purposes of this thesis are to present and debate about the viability of existing theories on how to grow a brand that it is built around a celebrity's image. This research seeks to verify, based on the experience of celebrity-focused brands founders and CEOs, if this type of brands offers any possible advantage against brands that are only product or service-focused.</p> <p>The research has been conducted through primary data collection of the qualitative type. The author has chosen to approach this research with face to face interviews in order to make the most of each question and the answers of each of the respondents. The interviewees are the two founders and owners of two celebrity-focused brands. Both of them count on a long expertise in marketing and advertising from decades of work in the industry prior to founding their company.</p> <p>Building a celebrity-focused brand can prove to be cost-efficient and more effective when establishing valuable connections with consumers, in comparison to product and service-focused brands. However, it is important to understand and know how utilise in the best possible way all of the marketing advantages that this type of brands can offer, especially the exploitation of the effect that parasocial interactions can have between the celebrity and the consumers. In addition to that, it results fundamental to also have clear alternatives on how to manage the risks that can exist because of dealing with a celebrity. It is also equally important the use of modern promotion and placement channels, in order to become more competitive against bigger brands in the same industry sector.</p> <p>The author recommends to those readers considering the idea of building a brand around a celebrity's image but that do not count on big budgets, to rely on the aforementioned inputs and to not necessarily follow step by step conventional approaches on market research and defining a target audience.</p> | |
| Keywords | Celebrity brands, parasocial interactions, social media |

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1 Introduction

Creating a brand involves defining several aspects in order to display what its image would represent to its future consumers. It is decisive to portray all of its values in an attractive way in order to, not only, differentiate from competitors in the market, but also to trigger a certain pattern of actions and reactions from its potential customers that would lead to the purchase of the company's products, hopefully in a continuous way. As a means to achieve these desired results, a brand should be marketed and advertised so that it gets discovered by people who are not yet aware of its existence, and also, to develop customer loyalty with those who already know of it. One of the main objectives of any brand is to grow and maintain a client base that would make the company behind it, grow larger and more profitable.

Thanks to having the opportunity of working for a Finnish company that creates alcoholic brands from scratch, the author has had the chance to participate in the designing and development of building of a brand. Interestingly enough, the company in question, only creates brands inspired after the image of iconic people - celebrities -. This factor presents various opportunities, as well as disadvantages in comparison to other types of brand when trying to make your business succeed. It makes it, perhaps, a more provocative challenge for an entrepreneur, and most certainly, a very interesting topic for this thesis.

When creating a brand that will act as an extension of a celebrity's image, most of the aforementioned steps-to-follow are mostly covered already. Many of the brand's perceived values will be determined by the values the public sees in the famous person that is endorsing it. Therefore, if the chosen celebrity is publicly admired, seen as a role model or just simply extremely charismatic and liked by others, the brand that is created around him or her, will most certainly count on very positive perceived values for starters. It is also very relevant to highlight that celebrities already have their own follower base, people who want to know more about them because they like them in a way or another; depending on the celebrity, the follower base could be of hundreds, thousands or even millions. All of these followers are, not only, potential customers for the new brand inspired on the celebrity they like, but they also act as indirect brand ambassadors by generating buzz about it when, for example, commenting to their acquaintances of the new existent products. Therefore, they represent an incredibly valuable resource that, as a new brand, did not cost anything to acquire; the company

would not need to depend on expensive advertising campaigns or highly-detailed market researches to achieve all of this, resulting in a major cost saving.

In an era where, thanks to the new technologies and social platforms, interconnectivity in between different cultures and locations around the globe is as simple as looking at the screen of our phones, celebrities have more reaching power than ever before. Considering that around 54% of the globe's population is connected to the internet and 43% is present in social media (Kemp, 2018), and that the vast majority of these users can be reached by association with their digital contacts and preferences thanks to the browser cookies, proves that celebrities have an advantageous position when advertising any kind of products. Their big followers base that constantly interacts with their publications generate connective algorithms that make the publications visible to their friends as well, even though they might not follow the celebrity themselves (Instagram, 2018) (Facebook, 2018). Therefore, creating a celebrity-focused brand might be the simplest and cheapest way to achieve and maintain a successful business nowadays especially when almost every single famous person seems to have at least one social media profile or fan pages that takes care of publishing content of their idols' lives. However all of this connectivity could act as a double-edged sword, the consumers and investors can be attentive towards each action of the celebrity that could have repercussions on his or her image and furthermore on the sales of their brand; a celebrity could fall out of favour due to expressing themselves in a socially-disliked attitude or taking the wrong action towards something or someone, leading to a very possible outcome of fans not identifying with them anymore and no longer buying their products.

Entrepreneurs often follow their own business ideas, creating them from scratch; frequently having to invest large sums of money creating their brand and generating an audience for it. This thesis seeks to research the effectiveness of an alternative strategy; by creating a brand and linking it to a celebrity is it possible to reduce plenty of costs and to facilitate the brand-customer interactions that would subsequently lead to an increase on the purchase intention of the consumer?

On this thesis, How to grow a successful celebrity-focused brand? It is looked to be debated on the challenges and advantages that could be faced when developing a brand that is based on a celebrity. This thesis looks to analyse the effectiveness of using celebrities as the brand for your products. Existent examples where brands were built after a celebrity's image will be presented, and the opinions of founders and

CEOs, based on their company's experiences, will be reviewed in comparison to existing theories on how to make this type of projects successful. The key questions that will lead to more detailed issues on the research interviews will be looked at, including aspects such as: Is fame the one and only crucial factor of a celebrity to make a brand successful? What actions do celebrities take to connect with their audience? Are there any challenges that could difficult the collaboration with a celebrity?

2 Literature Review

In order to analyse the potential advantages and disadvantages that the process of growing a successful celebrity-focused brand could face, we ought to have a basic and broad understanding of a few brand and marketing related concepts. We should review as well how these concepts would impact on possible consumers when the brand would be inspired by celebrity and not just built on a service or a product.

2.1 Creating and marketing a brand

The process of creating a brand and marketing it, are closely linked one to another. The values a brand portrays to differentiate itself from others set the direction and starting point for the strategies that will lead its marketing process towards communicating, interacting and triggering actions from its consumers.

2.1.1 What is a brand and how does it influence a consumer?

The term *brand* comes from the Old Norse word *brandr*, meaning "to burn" originally coming from the action of burning livestock with the purpose of identifying whose property they were from (Keller, 2013: 2). Just to put it in a simple way: A brand is an identifying symbol, mark, logo, name, word and/or sentence that companies use to distinguish their product from others (Aaker, 1999). Identifying property ownership was the original purpose, although this would also provide the buyer with a way of referral, accountability and differentiation in between producers and owners of the good they would be interested in.

As the definition implies, a brand is a way to transmit information; it can state ownership, but it can also express origin (Hollywood), style (Nike), values

(Greenpeace) and quality (Mercedes Benz). Whatever the message a brand wants to spread is, it might not always be the one the consumers might receive. A poor communication strategy can fail to express how the products would meet the needs of the buyers or it can lack differentiating elements from the competitors; this can lead to a misplacement of a brand in the customer's mind and end up making it unappealing. Therefore, the methods a company uses to develop its brand image are of decisive relevance in order to reach the desired impression on the consumers.

A brand can be composed of diverse products or services that ultimately transmit the aforementioned bits of information to the consumer's mind. It can also be built around a person or even a place, again, portraying varied extensions of its core while being interconnected by common principles, e.g. values and reputation of the person or characteristics of a place. (Keller, 2013: 17-20).

A brand not only transmits useful data about its characteristics and values, it also acts as a reference for the consumer to recall a positive or negative experience related to certain product or service. When consumers recognize a brand on a product, they do not need to spend extra time deciding whether they would like to choose it or not; they already have a predetermined preference based on their previous experience with that particular company, and if the experience was positive, they would most likely repeat it (Keller, 2013: 6). Take into account that this could also help to develop loyalty or in an unconscious way, a purchasing habit as well. Depending on the product, the customer might solely focus on the brand they already know. Having to invest time to research other brands might not be worth their time.

2.1.1.1 Brand Image

A very important aspect of a brand is the image by what it is perceived by the public. The thoughts that are triggered in a consumer's mind when thinking of a brand are of utmost relevance in order to increase the chances of purchasing or spreading the word about a product. According to Kevin L. Keller, a brand's image is mostly conformed by various associations that consumers make in between products and the values that they communicate. Even though different individuals might perceive different values from the same brand, common associations tend to exist in larger groups; the larger the group with common associations, the more clear perception of a company, and therefore the better defined it is the image of a brand (Keller, 2013: 44).

Although each individual can develop its own perception of a brand based on their values and experiences, a company can influence, until certain extent, how its brand image will be assimilated by larger groups. By taking into consideration and exercising commonly accepted values and behavioural attitudes that could be conditioned by cultural, economic, political and even geographic aspects, a brand can, not necessarily outshine, but at least avoid negative associations. A common social value that has actually been taken into consideration and embraced by a large number of businesses around the world since the 90's, is the concept of social responsibility. The idea of businesses giving back to communities has escalated from being demanded by consumers to becoming a must-do practice in order to be respected as a company, especially a big one (Jones, 2012).

2.1.2 Marketing

Marketing is “the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships to capture value from customers in return” (Kotler et al., 2013: 5). When explained in such a simple way, one might think that this activity could be dedicated solely to designing the most satisfactory product or service as possible for the customer, or simply to attending and reacting towards the feedback obtained from the consumers according to their experiences with the purchased goods; all of this with the only purposes of making sales and obtaining revenue. Although, in reality, Marketing gathers both, designing a product and Customer Relationships Management (CRM), and many other key sections of a business that aim to receive value from a customer but not only in a monetary way. The marketing science represents an indispensable one when wanting to run any company in a successful way (Kotler et al., 2013: 5-7).

The Marketing department of a business identifies and understands different *needs* and *wants* that the products or services offered could satisfy in a consumer. Through demographics analyses, it determines where these potential customers are located and how likely would they be persuaded to buy the goods that the company is selling. If necessary, once the results of the research have been evaluated, a Marketing team would suggest, price changes, modifications or complete discontinuity of a product if it concludes it no longer meets the demands of the consumers, or it could also recommend reconsidering targeting a new type of customer, or a different location where the original product would still be relevant or the competition would still allow it to

differentiate in a better way. Marketing is also concerned with promoting the products to the public, either on the launching or during follow-ups; it manages the budget distribution and advertising placements in order to make campaigns as efficient and effective as possible. The main goal of this whole process is, without a doubt, to create and maintain relationships with customers that will sustain a company in a profitable way in the long run. Although, as mentioned before, that does not necessarily mean that it will be only expected continuous purchases from a customer. Marketing looks to create loyalty from the consumers towards the brand, delivering an expected satisfaction level so that the customers not only include a product in their daily lifestyle but also act as unofficial brand ambassadors that will attract more people with similar interests. Further reading on the topic (Kotler et al., 2013: 5-7)

2.1.2.1 Placement and Promotion of a brand

Two of the main key steps when marketing a brand are the placement and promotion of its products and its image. Figure 1 illustrates and breaks down different elements of the 4 Ps, as part of a model called the Marketing Mix.

The Marketing Mix involves a group of defined components intended as a guide and tools for marketers to use in order to create and deliver the ideal product for the targeted customer expecting to trigger a desired response from them (Kotler et al., 2013: 53-54).

2.1.2.1.1 Integrated Marketing Communications

Promoting a brand and its products plays a key role in order to materialize sales. In this area, it is also particularly important to choose the right channels of communication. Depending on the target audience, a company should balance their promotions in between physical, traditional and digital platforms; aspects such as desired reach, frequency and impact of the advertisement on the audience should also be considered. The goal of Integrated Marketing Communication is to accurately define and plan the proper combination of different communication practices while considering the balance and functions of each of them as part of a holistic delivery strategy that would always seek to reach the consumer with relevant information and on consistent bases (Kotler et al., 2013: 53-54; Kotler and Keller, 2012: 495, 510-526).

2.1.2.1.2 Earned Media as a key promotion element

It is important to mention that the promotion process presents an interconnected relation among a brand's paid, owned and earned media. The 3 of them ought to be well balanced in order to make the most out of the money and time invested in advertising, the public relations of the company, and the content generated for free by users, customers, and product reviewers (Keller, 2013: 211; Kotler and Keller, 2012: 546).

Earned media -sometimes called free media- is all the PR benefits a firm receives without having directly paid for anything -all the news stories, blogs, social network conversations that deal with a brand" (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 546). In order for earned media to be generated from fans and consumers, a company has to invest in creating and developing products, and into advertising them on paid and owned channels of promotion. The goal should be to capture the consumer's attention in a way that motivates them to engage and generate buzz about the brand in question (Kotler and Keller, 2012: 546). It is worth noticing that the bigger a fan/consumer base of a brand is, the easier and the cheaper it is for it to spread news through its owned channels, and to reach larger amounts of people having to invest way less in advertising. Thus, proportionally speaking, brands with a bigger fan/consumer bases, have bigger chances of receiving free media and engagement through word of mouth and user generated content.

2.1.2.1.2.1 Word-of-mouth

The content created by fans and customers, as well as any other way of them transmitting information about a brand with their acquaintance circles, simply constitutes the so-called word-of-mouth. A positive communication referring a brand would not only create brand awareness, but it would also portray a good brand image among new potential consumers, increasing the chances of sales. On the other hand, negative feedback about a brand would lead to an increase in the brand's image awareness but, this time, in a prejudicial way (Quesenberry, 2015).

Word-of-mouth influence can have a powerful impact on consumer buying behaviour. The personal words and recommendations of trusted friends, associates and other consumers tend to be more credible than those coming from commercial sources, such as advertisements or salespeople. Word-of-mouth influence happens naturally: consumers start chatting about a brand they use or feel strongly about one way or the other. Often, however, rather than

leaving it to chance, marketers can help to create positive conversations about their brands (Kotler et al., 2013: 149-150).

2.1.2.1.3 Online presence as key placement and promotion channels

The placement of products consists principally, in making the products available for the desired consumer in an effective and efficient way. The goal is to try to be present in as many channels and locations as possible where the targeted consumers exist in order to gain more brand visibility and potential customers. It allows customers to be able to purchase goods through as many channels as possible depending on where they are present (Kotler et al., 2013: 53-54).

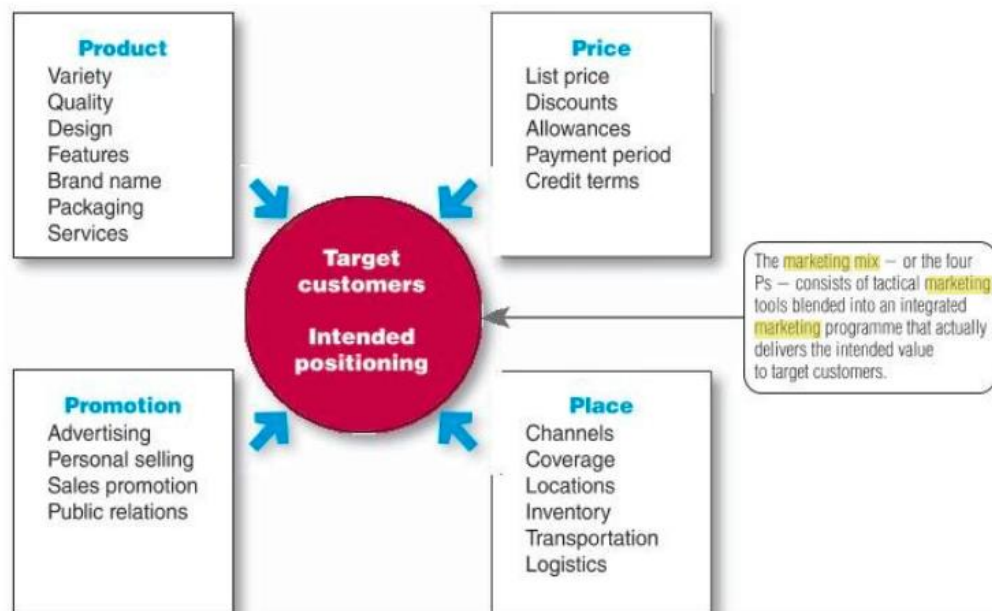


Figure 1. The four Ps of the marketing mix by Kotler et al., 2013:53

2.2 Celebrity-focused brands

Developing a brand after a celebrity's image could grant some advantage for companies against its competitors in terms of brand awareness, cost reduction and customer loyalty. Identifying who a suitable celebrity is to represent a product, and understanding the why and how it would be perceived in a desired manner by consumers, are fundamental bases to the whole process.

2.2.1 Who is a celebrity?

A celebrity tends to be someone who is recognised by others because of being famous in a particular activity or sector that would grant them a certain level of public attention. It could be a talented musician, a prominent medical researcher, or a simple person with no apparent useful skills but gifted with good looks and/or heir to their family's fame. (Pringle, 2004: loc. 166)

2.2.2 Why is a celebrity interesting to marketers?

In a business perspective, a “celebrity” is anyone who is familiar enough to the people a brand wishes to communicate with to add values to that communication by association with their image and reputation” (Pringle, 2004: loc. 166). Thus, a celebrity can be used as an opinion leader by brands in order to penetrate their target audience circles.

The main objective is to reach the consumers in a more effective and memorable way than competitors, and what better way to do it than by endorsing a product with a popular person to whom people look up to. A celebrity endorser is defined as “anyone who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (Chung and Cho, 2017).

2.2.2.1 Opinion leaders

An opinion leader is an individual that, within a certain reference group, is capable of wielding influence on the rest of the members. They often gain their influential status due to their personality or charisma, level of knowledge or expertise on a certain field, or a particular set of skills that generate interest within the rest of the members of the reference group that they belong to. Opinion leaders tend to offer information, reviews and recommendations about products and services that they might have tried, know a lot about, or just simply identify with.

The use of opinion leaders tends to be an attractive marketing strategy for many brands due to their ability to start and shape trends and incite fans to generate buzz about a particular product, service or even social, cultural and political views. Further reading on this topic (Kotler et al., 2013: 149-150)

2.2.2.2 How to outshine the competitors

Unless a company's product is in a very niche market, chances are that there are many brands competing for attracting the same type of customer's attention on a shelf. Having a unique value proposition or perhaps a competitive price, are classic strategies for marketers to win their way into the customer's wallet share. However, using a celebrity as the image of your brand can trigger certain emotional reactions from the consumer making them favour a product despite not being the best in its category.

The expected effect by marketers, is for a celebrity to transmit some of his personal fame and reputation to the brand in question while transmitting to the consumer the idea of quality by association, resulting in better sales and outshining the competition (Pringle, 2004: loc. 130, loc. 599; Muda, Musa and Putit, 2012; Till and Shimp, 1998).

2.2.3 Matching celebrity & brand

Perhaps the main principle to take into consideration might be the most obvious one for many: a brand-celebrity relationship has better chances of success if both of them present similarities on how they are perceived by the public. It results easier for the consumer to establish a connection between a product and famous person if the values of both parties coincide at least on some level of interpretation. (Pringles, 2004: loc. 836; Muda, Musa and Putit, 2012;).

Research shows that not all product categories are considerably susceptible to the use of a celebrity on their advertising in terms of the level of attention and memorability from the consumer towards the brand. Therefore, a brand ought to be sure that the use of a celebrity is a worthy investment, with promising returns, before jumping to create a, perhaps unnecessary, association in the first place. However, when it comes to product categories involving personal consumption and personal appearance (e.g. fashion, alcoholic beverages, etc), there are also studies that prove that the use of celebrities on their brand communications can have a significantly positive effect in terms of consumer's level of attention and purchase intention. "If the celebrities are carefully chosen to suit the brand, they will provide the meaningful resonance and positive disposition which leads to 'subscription' and the building of a successful relationship" (Pringle, 2004: loc. 781, loc. 1025-1065).

Several researchers, over many decades, have discussed and experimented on elements that could or could not present a level of relevancy when looking to obtain better product-consumer interactions by matching a celebrity with a brand. Overall, these studies have concluded that in most cases, 3 specific factors (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness/likeability) and their respective projections are the ones worth to be taken into consideration when creating celebrity-brand associations. Ultimately, the goal is for the celebrity to transmit credibility to the consumers, getting them to believe in the values that are advertised (Muda, Musa and Putit, 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2012: 485).

It is not mandatory to put into action the 3 aforementioned elements at the same time when linking a celebrity to a brand, in some cases having a celebrity portray only one of them at the time will suffice depending on the product or brand advertised. The main concern is to identify the necessary element or combination of elements in a celebrity that would fit adequately the brand's identity when presenting the product or service to the consumer. A celebrity must act as an extension of the brand, or vice versa, in a way that both of them support each other's image. However, all of the previously mentioned still does not suffice in order to guarantee success; attractiveness, trustworthiness and, until some extent, expertise can be subject to cultural appreciation in different areas of the world (Muda, Musa and Putit, 2012).

2.2.4 Possible challenges on brand-celebrity relationship

Creating a brand after a celebrity is not a strategy that would necessarily be exempt from challenges. Despite the advantages presented in this thesis, many obstacles are to be considered when executing approach. Issues like the cost of the celebrity, dealing with intermediaries, possible misconduct of the celebrity or even greediness on their side, are obstacles that could interfere at any given time.

2.2.4.1 Is it costly to use a celebrity?

The more famous the celebrity connected for your brand is, the more expensive it will be to afford them. Getting celebrities to participate in ads could require a big initial investment for any company by having to pay them beforehand. However, when a celebrity is to be involved or, better yet represented by a brand, there is a much better

and economical way that could end up bringing bigger and long-term profits to both parties instead of an initial buyout (Pringle, 2004: loc. 1876-1908).

If it is just a celebrity promoting a brand that they do not have any attachment to, then, they will probably be motivated for only as long as their contract lasts. After that, the celebrity might not even want to work for the brand again unless they are paid a bigger amount than what they previously got. Contrary to that scenario, offering royalty payments, profit shares or stakes of a company, as an alternative payment method to a celebrity can drastically change the level of involvement of the latter with the brand they are to advertise. Additionally, the company using the celebrity, would not need to have a big initial investment for getting them to advertise their brand for a determined period of time, instead they would now get them to be interested in promoting the brand on their own in order to keep it generating revenue on stable bases and for as long as there would be good expectations of profitability (Pringle, 2004: loc. 1876-1908).

2.2.4.2 Risk of intermediaries

Celebrities are also exposed to conflicting or confusing opinions coming from their relative and associate circles who might perceive business contracts in a different way than they do. This could lay a negative weight on their brand relationships, complicating, slowing down, and in some cases, even leading to a full stop on the brand-celebrity cooperation. Highly influential family members or, perhaps, old-time friends might easily affect the celebrity's decision-making process (Pringle, 2004: loc. 1792-1794).

Agents can also be particularly influential when dealing with a celebrity, despite the fact that they probably have their client's ear, an agent will need to be considered for the monetary part of the contract as well. Agents will always have the upper hand when proposing the initial negotiation price for their celebrity clients. In order to always get a better deal, they could withhold relevant information that could lower the celebrity price but that someone who does not belong to their industry would have no reason to know e.g. the celebrity is not being requested for many jobs recently, the celebrity might be going through a struggling financial period. (Pringle, 2004: loc. 1806-1831).

2.2.4.3 Celebrities and possible misconduct

Celebrities are only human after all, and by default, they are not necessarily perfect. Like any other person, they commit mistakes and, in some cases, they could be involved in criminal activities. When celebrities find themselves in a compromising situation where their mistakes have been publicly exposed, their image can get seriously damaged, and depending on the level of their offence, they could fall into disgrace with their fans, their employers or with brands they are sponsoring for. In the same way that quality can be transmitted by association, a celebrity's negative image can have repercussions on the image of the brand they represent. (Muda, Musa and Putit, 2012; Till and Shimp, 1998).

When a brand's image is negatively affected due to being associated with a misbehaving celebrity, its sales and profitability are prone to suffer unfavourable consequences, at least in the short term. It is worth pointing out that, even though the case might be where two celebrities representing different brands might have committed the exact same offence, both of the brands might not necessarily get affected in the same way. According to conducted studies by the authors Till and Shimp in 1998, companies that do not owe their fame nor reputation to their spokesperson have lower risks of having losses, in any case, just by distancing themselves from the celebrities in question, they could easily avoid consumer retribution (Till and Shimp, 1998). Companies could use their celebrity scandals as an opportunity to make a moral statement that would work to their favour. Researchers Hock and Raithel noticed that companies experienced a positive increase in their stock price when they took action on the scandals involving celebrities that they were linked to; firms that would react faster would get to see a bigger impact on the stock price. However, if actions are not taken on the companies' side, they would not necessarily have to shut down their business, but they could suffer significant monetary losses (Harvard Business Review, 2019).

The incidents involving Tiger Woods marital infidelity and his driving under the influence of toxic substances episode, that subsequently, ended up in a car crash, cost the sum of \$12 billion in losses to investors who had shares in brands that were advertising with the athlete; the losses were marked by the fall of the share prices of those companies (Harvard Business Review, 2019). Another example of when a company has experienced negative consequences because of its public spokesperson, was when Elon Musk, Tesla's CEO, smoked marijuana on a live internet podcast. This

event added extra weight to the already controversial reputation of Musk, who had recently been accused by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, of manipulating information in order to get Tesla's stock value up. It all led to the resignation of two senior executives of the company and Tesla's stock value to go down by a 6% a day after it all happened (Neate and Wong, 2018; Fox Business, 2018; La Monica, 2018; U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2018).

Till and Shimp also point out an opposite scenario, where brands are more susceptible to their celebrity scandals. When companies are not yet properly settled in the consumer's mind and they deeply rely on the celebrity's fame to connect with their audience or when brands are closely associated with celebrities in a way that each of them act as an extension of the other, the effect of a celebrity scandal, will most certainly cause a bigger damage to the brand (Till and Shimp, 1998).

A clear example of the aforementioned is when a brand is created after a celebrity, particularly when it carries the same name as their celebrity spokesperson. When celebrity film producer Harvey Weinstein began being accused of sexual harassment and assault against many women, dating back to a few decades, The Weinstein Company, of which he was co-founder, took action immediately; Harvey Weinstein got fired from the board of the company three days after the first allegations emerged. Regardless of that, the company began rapidly falling from grace with the public and other producing companies; it all got worse when new accusations against Harvey Weinstein revealed that some of the harassment and assault incidents happened with company employees. Eventually, the company carrying Harvey's family name had to file for bankruptcy, only almost 6 months since the first allegations emerged (BBC News, 2019; The Guardian, 2019).

The risk of a celebrity getting involved in public scandals is always present, thus companies will always be exposed to potentially uncomfortable situations when using them as their brand spokespersons. As an alternative strategy, many brands will choose deceased celebrities to represent or endorse their image and products. Once a celebrity has passed away, they will not be involved in any future public scandals that could lead to problems of the companies using their image (Till and Shimp, 1998).

2.2.4.4 Consumer's Perception

Perhaps, with the ambition of obtaining more revenue, fame or just simply wanting to be involved in as many projects as possible, celebrities could incur into the mistake of overexposing themselves to the consumers by being associated with too many brands or products at once. Advertising for many brands during the same period of time would lead to consumers perceiving a lesser connection in between the celebrity and any of the brands in question, thus none of the brands would truly become memorable because of their famous spokesperson. Furthermore, this could lead to feelings of doubt from the consumers towards the brand-celebrity relationship. The celebrity endorsement could lose all of its effectiveness since the audience would come to believe the incentive for the celebrity to be behind certain brand is purely monetary and lacking any kind of values connection (Muda, Musa and Putit, 2012; Zhou and Whitla, 2013).

2.3 Social media as a business tool

Historically, companies have tried to reach their consumers through any means that had been the most effective at a determined given time e.g. newspaper, radio, billboards, tv, etc. The methodology has always been to be present where the consumer is. Thus, it is only logical that nowadays, companies look to have profiles and pages on social media platforms in order to reach their customers. With an estimate of 2.48 billions of users present on social media platforms in 2017 and forecasting this number to rise up to 3.09 billion by 2021 (Clement, 2019), these communication channels have an incredible consumer reaching power. To put things a bit into perspective, statistics show that in 2017 there were about 1.63 billion TV households in the world and the number was expected to rise up to 1.74 by 2023; both numbers way below than the previously mentioned (Watson, 2019).

2.3.1 Social media as a part of the marketing mix

Social media not only permits businesses to reach billions of potential consumers online, but it also allows companies to receive direct and individual feedback from them, all of it, in real-time while promotions are being run or products are being released. Social media platforms also foster consumer-to-consumer communications, making it possible for them to review, rate and debate about products, services or even

the brands that offer them. This grants brands the opportunity to use social media as part of their Integrated Marketing Communications strategies, and to monitor and regulate, until certain extent the buzz that it is generated about their products. On the other hand, consumer-to-consumer communications, which is it's an enhancement of the traditional word-of-mouth, is beyond the companies control; while it can increase the positive buzz about a product, it can also spread rapidly negative opinions and cause damage to a brand image if not assessed in a quick manner.

Having products available online, allows consumers to research details and information about the goods they'd like to buy, it also helps them save time and reduce the effort when searching for items of their interest. In many cases, consumers can directly buy online, from the commodity of their homes at any given hour during the day and get the products delivered to their doorsteps, or if preferred they can book the products to be picked at the nearest local shop of their choosing. Depending on the distribution capabilities of a company, products can be acquired by consumers regardless of their location in the globe. The online marketplaces allow companies to collect data on the consumer's interests and to tailor future personalised offers based on the navigation habits of each visitor. It is worth mentioning that by building a strong online presence brands can reduce their costs in advertising and rely more on the word-of-mouth buzz as well as the user generated content (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Solomon et al., 2013; Kotler and Keller, 2012: 540; Kotler et al., 2013: 114).

2.3.2 Celebrities, fans and the parasocial effect on social media

Thanks to the large number of followers that celebrities have on their social media profiles they can guarantee a certain level of exposure of whatever event or product they decide to post or broadcast about. The more followers a celebrity has, the more attractive he or she becomes to use as a product endorser (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

In an article written by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl that was published decades ago, the concept of para-social interactions was developed (Horton and Wohl, 1956: 215) "Parasocial relationships arise when individuals are repeatedly exposed to a media persona, and the individuals develop a sense of intimacy, perceived friendship, and identification with the celebrity" (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

In an era where almost everyone has social media on their phones, which they carry all the time. Following the news and personal details about celebrities of your liking results easier than ever. “Celebrities increasingly use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media platforms for personal communication, revealing their personal lives and thoughts to consumers” (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

While in the past, celebrities used to be more reserved about their personal lives, nowadays many of them voluntarily disclose private details to their audience. In addition to that, new tools on different social media channels allow celebrities to ask questions or get their followers to make a decision for them by opening a voting poll (Heathman, 2019). Now fans can send their personal opinions to celebrities and get the feeling of an “existent” dialogue with their idols.

“These new media environments have narrowed the distance between audiences and celebrities and have altered the role of audiences from that of mere spectators or admirers to “friends” of celebrities...The interactive conversation with celebrities and the hope of receiving exclusive communication from them excite fans and encourages them to remain dedicated to the celebrities they follow” (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

This particular approach makes fans wanting to keep up to date with whatever is happening in the celebrity’s life e.g. watching their shows, reading news about them, etc. thus, it guarantees more views on social media posts related to the celebrity. The effect intensifies when the celebrities address their fans in a direct and personal way and normally speaks with “the use of the first person (“I” and “we”). It all contributes to fans to develop a stronger personal feeling of intimacy with the celebrity, making them sometimes, even feel that they are their friends (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

In the same way that it was found that consumers would associate celebrities positive qualities and be motivated to buy products that were endorsed by celebrities they were keen on (Pringle 2004: 781, 1025-1065) when fans develop a parasocial relationship with celebrities they simultaneously grow affinity to products related to their idols. Furthermore, on a study by Labrecque (2014) was found that consumers increase the intensity of their parasocial relationships with brands when they had perceived “a high level of interaction and openness in their communication with brands on social media” (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

Social media interactions between fan and celebrity endorser aid the formation of parasocial relationships; when the celebrity is perceived to self-disclose private

information, this effect gets enhanced. Then, it develops a feeling of trustworthiness from the fan towards the celebrity, and credibility towards any brand and products related to them. It all leads to fans being genuinely motivated to purchase said brand and products. Furthermore, parasocial relationships can soften the blow from possible negative publicity affecting a celebrity or the brand they endorse “consumers in deep parasocial relationships with celebrities are understanding and forgiving, and are therefore less likely to be affected by negative information they find in celebrities’ social media messages” (Chung and Cho, 2017: 481-495).

3 Research methodology

The following research has been conducted through primary data collection of the qualitative type. Primary data refers to the “information that is collected first-hand, generated by original research tailor-made to answer specific current research questions” (Hollensen, 2014: 176). A qualitative research type is defined when there is “a large number of variables and few respondents” (Hollensen, 2014: 181), it looks to gain depth into the specific research topic. The chosen approach by the author for this research is the one of face to face interviews, this type of methodology looks to make the most of each of the questions and answers from each of the respondents. This research is exploratory, meaning that its objective is “to gather preliminary information that will help define problems and suggest hypotheses” (Kotler et al., 2013: 114).

3.1 Data Collection

For this thesis research, two of the brands created by the company One Eyed Spirits have been chosen by the author. The first one: Ron de Jeremy Rum, which was created after the image of Ron Jeremy, an adult film star and world-renowned icon that first reached fame in the 1980s. The second one: Tom of Finland Organic Vodka inspired by the image of Touko Laaksonen, a Finnish icon, considered to be one of the most influential artists of the 20th century and a pioneer and revolutionary persona of the gay culture and modern civil rights movements.

Ron de Jeremy Rum has been in the market since 2011 and Tom of Finland Organic Vodka since 2017. Both of the brands have experience continuous success since each

of the beginning of their operations, continuously expanding to new markets and increasing their numbers in sales.

The author will interview Olli Hietalahti (OH) and Jouko Laune (JL), both founders of the company, CEO and CMO respectively. Both of them count on a long expertise on marketing and advertising from decades of work in the industry prior to founding their company.

Their interview will be conducted at the same time with both of them together. The interviewees are to choose who will answer a question in each case, although Mr. Laune will answer the specifications about Ron de Jeremy Rum and Mr. Hietalahti will do the same about Tom of Finland Organic Vodka.

Through this interview, it is sought for the opinions of both, Mr. Hietalahti and Mr. Laune about the theories presented on this thesis. The author seeks to collect information on what their thoughts are about elements to be considered when creating a brand and marketing it, and on some of the proposed steps-to-follow when creating and managing a brand inspired on a celebrity. The final objectives are to verify if the proposed theories apply to the methodology they employed when creating their brands and established brand-celebrity-consumers relationships. More importantly the research seeks to suggest celebrity-focused brands offer any possible advantage against brands that are only product or service-focused.

The interview will be divided by sections that include all of the main researched topics in the literature review of this thesis. The sections will be the following: Creating and marketing a brand, celebrity-focused brands and social media as a business tool.

3.2 Interview

3.2.1 Creating and marketing a brand

How would you define a brand?

OH - A brand is a collective pool of all the thoughts and ideas that you have. Thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences that you have towards some particular product. Brands are the attributes that make a product relevant and distinctive in comparison to the rest.

JL - A brand is a way to identify yourself as a company. The consumers know what to expect of a product because they can identify the brand behind it, otherwise it could be a surprise.

What do you feel are important elements for a brand to have in order to be relevant with consumers?

OH - A brand has to be distinctive; it has to offer a value of some sort that would resonate in the mind of a consumer and fulfil a need or a desire.

JL - It's all about what a brand can do for you. Its products have to be useful or enjoyable for the consumer so that they can connect with it. If the consumer does not find a use for its products, then the brand is possibly not relevant for them at least in a direct or positive way.

How is it important for customers to recognize and understand the values that your brand offers?

JL - Quite important. The whole business depends on it, especially if your price enters into the premium category. It brings synergy to the marketing process; the customer notices your product, gets attracted and feels interest for the brand and the values that it is offering, and due to that they will finally get to buy it and become a loyal if they are satisfied with it. You have to be relevant to what the customer is looking for, and of course, you have to deliver on the promise of what you are offering. That way the customer can connect with you.

Can you explain how marketing has changed over your career?

OH - 15-20 years ago, there were less promotion channels, and therefore your budget for each channel would be bigger, you could invest more money into your ideas, you could afford to make longer ads or promotions. Then when the change came with the online era, suddenly appeared many more channels where to advertise and reach your consumers. The budgets got smaller and the ads format became shorter as well, the ideas got more precise and there was less margin to adorn a concept. In a way it was a revolution, you now need to be clearer and more effective than ever when reaching consumers and getting them to be interested and purchase your product. Back in the day, there were fewer limits to what you could say in an ad, now everybody is offended

by something and messages are sometimes at risk of becoming dull, making brands to lose the edge and their distinction.

Do you consider the Promotion of your brand as a key element in your marketing strategy? Is it important to reach consumers with relevant information and on constant bases? Please elaborate.

OH - Definitely, especially for small brands that have to compete against the big players. Since small brands don't usually count on big budgets, they have to make the most out of each ad and make quality a priority over quantity. The goal is to be on top of mind of the consumer as much as possible while being careful not to overwhelm them. Consumers can forget your brand quickly nowadays that there's so many other brands competing for their attention.

How is your brand's earned media relevant to your marketing strategy? How do you use it?

JL - As a small company we can't compete against multinationals with paid media. Therefore, we appreciate and make the most of any publicity we could get from external parties (fans, magazines, bloggers, professionals in our industry). We constantly share relevant content generated by them, it makes our brands look more influential by having more diversity on the type of content and where it comes from. Also, fans are quite happy when you repost their pictures or videos, they feel recognized and motivated to do more for your brand.

Do you take any action in order to motivate consumers to generate free media? Please elaborate?

OH - Normally we make sure to send samples to bloggers and social media influencers, we do it as a product exchange so that we get content created in return. We've gotten the opportunity to cooperate with people from very different communities (cigar aficionados, pin up industry, luxury watches, tattoo artists, Spirits connoisseurs, etc) which ultimately adds value to our brand and attracts new consumers from different segments. We organize competitions and raffles for fans as well. In order to win they often have to create content and generate engagement for the brand. We like to organize cocktail competitions every now and then for bartenders, in order to classify they ought to go through the same process as we just explained. This type of events

generates a lot of attention for our brand, especially in the nightlife industry, it also brings new cocktail recipes for people to try with our products. On the last cocktail competition we had, we got 72 participants from a total of 15 countries.

How important is word of mouth marketing in the development of a brand? Can it have a positive or a negative impact on a brand?

JL - It's fundamental, the more interesting and engaging your brand is, the more chances there are of people talking about it. This helps you be more present on the consumers' minds and to reduce the amount of investment that you put into promotion. We are quite proud of the job we have made on this area, getting people to talk about Ron de Jeremy Rum. In 2018, we got listed among the Top 10 Trending Rums in The World by a questionnaire that is annually conducted by the magazine Drinks International (a very relevant source in the Spirits industry) and that it includes answers from the 150 most popular bars around the globe. We are happy to say that we were the only small brand among those 10, certainly the only brand that did not spend hundreds of thousands of euros on its marketing and advertising campaigns.

On the other hand, you always have to be careful about possible negative buzz that could exist about your brand. Dissatisfied consumers tend to make public their opinions quite often. On online platforms, negative opinions can spread easily and faster than ever before, reaching many in a manner of minutes.

Do you consider that the bigger the followers base of a brand is, the cheaper it is to spread the news through the brand's owned channels?

JL- Of course, the more people that already follow you, the less money you have to invest in ads to try to reach them. Also, the more people that will potentially use the word-of-mouth to talk about your product.

Do you consider the Placement of your brand as a key element in your marketing strategy? Is it important to try to have the product available in as many channels as possible so that it results easier for the consumer to obtain it?

OH - The placement of a brand is something fundamental and to always take into considerations. The goal is to offer consumers the opportunity to find your product in the most convenient way as possible. Of course, when you are a small company you

have to prioritize what channels are the ones that are the most convenient among the ones you can afford to present at.

Is it important to have your product available online? How does it compare to more traditional channels?

JL - Thanks to this new technology brands can reach their audience in an easier way. It does not revolve necessarily around the amount of money you put into it. The more quality and more engaging the content you create for your audience is, the bigger the chances to get the word to spread. It also allows customers to order from any destination in the world that you would be capable to deliver to. We work with online retailers that deliver our products to countries where we have no importer nor distribution, without e-commerce, this would not be possible.

OH - It also standardizes the format in which you can present your brand. While a big brand could afford to have much bigger stands or shop displays in physical locations, now they are behind a screen, listed like any other product in any online retailer, it evens the game a bit more. Of course, this does not mean that things are equal at all, like in television, the ones with more money will always be able to buy more ad space and time, as well as to invest the most in creating more varied content. That's why, as said before the importance, especially for smaller brands to foster the development of earned media and word-of-mouth.

3.2.2 Celebrity-focused brands

Please talk me through the process of how you created your first celebrity brand. (Did you define a target market? Did you feel the brand story would attract a unique following?)

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - It all started from a joke. The word "ron" means "rum" in Spanish while at the same time it is a common name in English. Thus, we thought that choosing a celebrity whose name was Ron to be the image of our brand would only be logical and of course fun. We thought the whole thing was really funny, and that people would really appreciate the joke as much as we did. Obviously, we choose Ron Jeremy, who happens to be a

very funny guy so that people who knew of him, would easily make the “fun” connection. We did not do any target audience research; we had a gut feeling. The Spirits industry had always been full of brands that take themselves too seriously, we believed that consumers would appreciate a good quality product with a fun concept behind it for change.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - The Finnish Postal came up with stamps that had Tom of Finland drawings on it. At the time, we had been doing Ron de Jeremy Rum for 3 years already, and so when we saw the stamps, we thought “well that’s really interesting”, that could be another brand for us. Again, there was a gut feeling, an intuition that there could be something here.

No target audience research was made, we felt that we had enough experience from our previous years working in marketing to recognize good ideas like these ones.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka obviously targets the LGBT community, but also people who are enlightened in general. We thought they would appreciate the fact that Tom was being paid homage in this new creative and interesting way. We certainly thought of how it would resonate positively for Finnish people, but of course the global appeal was certainly a priority. Taking into account that Tom of Finland had been an international brand for many decades already, we were confident that things would work out.

How is your brand perceived by consumers – what adjectives do consumers use to describe your brand?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - We always say that we try to get two smiles from the consumer. The first one when they recognize Ron Jeremy or we tell them who he is, and the second one when they taste the product and get surprised about how seriously good the liquid is. It depends on whether the consumers recognize Ron or not. If they know about him the most common reaction is indeed a smile and quite often you would hear them telling jokes about it, there’s an instant emotional connection. If they don’t know Ron, then they usually think is a high-quality brand because of its bottle and label design as well as its

price category. Once they've tried the product, what we expect, which by the way, it is what it often happens, is that those who knew about Ron get double surprised than the rest. The fans tend to associate Ron Jeremy with fun but not necessarily with quality, so it's incredibly rewarding to see they appreciate the product not only because of the fun but also because of its quality.

Consumers usually refer to Ron de Jeremy Rum as "fun" and "awesome". Some find it "strange"; they usually wonder why we would use a porn star for this. Quite often we hear them commenting that it is of "high-quality", the particular smoothness of our brand makes it quite pleasant to drink even for those who are not experienced Spirits drinkers.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - Especially if you belong to the LGBT community, you probably know of who Tom of Finland was and what he stood for. They usually feel pride and, in some cases, feel identified by the values of the brand, which is exactly what we were going for: honouring Tom and the values he stood for. People tend to be fascinated by the design of the bottle; it is stylish and elegant and feels firm, yet comfortable to the touch. There's an extra interest because of being an organic product. Now that people are more self-conscious than ever about what they consume and the effect that the goods production can have on the planet, organic products seem to be getting more interest, especially from a more educated audience. Another good thing is that people get quite surprised by discovering how smooth the liquid is, especially for a vodka.

Consumers usually refer to Tom of Finland Organic Vodka as "iconic", "masculine" and "daring".

How important is it for your brands and the celebrity that represent them to identify with socially accepted values in order to gain better acceptance from the audience?

OH - The most important thing for us is to create positive emotions. In order to be distinctive, 100% of people will never be happy, some people will always be bothered by what you do, and you have to be ok with that reality. However, as a brand, you always have to be accepted by society. Brands need to evolve and pay particular attention to behaviour that is disliked by society in order to avoid it. When the audience

feels that what you do is against their beliefs or norms, they could create bad publicity or even try to boycott your products. Furthermore, the case might be where your customers are not bothered by what you do at all, but a big part of society still is. Particularly in the Spirits industry, your wholesalers and retailers might get concerned about how this might affect their business. They could choose to stop carrying your brand in order to avoid any possible reprisal from their consumers. The whole thing could affect your brand commercially.

When customers recognize the celebrity who is portrayed by your brand, do they make value associations in between the celebrity and the brand?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - Yes, they do, often a negative value association. Because of Ron's reputation, the fans think that the product will be a gimmick using Ron Jeremy's image and it will lack quality. As we explained before, we use this element to our advantage to create a bigger surprise for the consumers when they get to try the liquid and to realize by themselves of how good it is. The whole surprise effect actually enhances the experience of discovering the brand.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - It's actually a positive value association as soon as they meet the brand. Mostly because Tom of Finland represents good and deep values among some of the current self-actualization trends that society is experiencing nowadays like the idea of becoming whoever you want to be, more specifically, in terms of your gender and sexual identity. People tend to appreciate the similarities on the brand's aesthetics and the artist's drawings. It makes the product attractive and exciting.

Do consumers associate some of the celebrity's positive qualities with your brand?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - Certainly, mostly in a fun and sexual way. People always joke about the rum having a "big taste" and about how drinking it could get them to enhance their love-making skills.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - Yes, exactly as I explained in the previous question.

Do people find it hard to understand the connection between the celebrity and your brand? Please elaborate.

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - At the beginning, yes, especially if they don't speak Spanish or know that Ron is a common name in English. Once they've read the back label of the bottle and get an explanation on how the brand came to be, then it all makes sense. Usually people get surprised about the clever word game in between languages.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - Yes, but we've seen that often they are interested in understanding why. The curiosity drives them to research on the brand and get an explanation. The explanation is very simple anyway, we, as a Finnish company, decided to pay homage to Tom of Finland, and we chose vodka because Finnish are famously known for drinking white Spirits, in particular this one. In addition to that, vodka happens to be one of the most popular Spirits category among gay men all over the world.

On both brands:

JL - We would like to highlight that the surprise factor that brings the connections we have made with both of the celebrities and our brands actually enhances the curiosity of the fans towards our products. People normally go like "oh wow, that's something different", they get more interested by the unexpected connection between the celebrity and this type of product. This factor helps to create a positive emotion towards the product before even trying it.

What of the following elements, expertise, trustworthiness or attractiveness do you consider Ron/Tom transmit to the consumers when associated with your brand? Do you consider them relevant for the consumer to assimilate the brand positively? Please Elaborate.

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - With Ron Jeremy, it's certainly *attractiveness*, not in the way that people necessarily find him attractive physically at first glance, but more in an indirect way. He attracts attention, which he then uses to create emotional attraction. He easily makes people smile and gets them in a good mood, that's the right way to say it, and that's sort of being attracted to a feeling more than to the appearance. He is a very charismatic person, who doesn't mind joking about himself or others, always in a very friendly way. His fans are also attracted to him because he portrays the image of the common man that can succeed in life regardless of where he comes from or regardless of not having a top model body.

There's not that much of the *trustworthiness* element on Ron's image. As I mentioned before, people who know about Ron, tend to be sceptical about the quality of the product until they try it. Ron Jeremy is very good for attracting people and creating awareness for our brand, but the trustworthiness in our products is gained once the consumers have tried them and realize that they are of very good quality.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - In Tom of Finland's case the element of *attractiveness* is pretty clear, it's definitely a key element for the brand. He was a visual artist, an expert in his field. His work speaks for itself. It creates attention and people get easily attracted by the appearance of the characters that he used to draw. Let's take into consideration that his whole work was meant to be erotic, highlighting the beauty of the masculine body, therefore it was intentionally created to be attractive.

Trustworthiness is also part of how people perceive the brand of Tom of Finland in a way, an artist inspiring value. He was a highly respected artist, a believer of the values he was defending. Also, nowadays, the brand is known through The Tom of Finland Foundation, which is the entity that manages its image and makes sure to select the it associates with, so in a way their followers trust them to always pick the right products.

I would like to add another positive element to the list that we feel applies to the Tom of Finland celebrity and to our brand. There is a present *inspirational* factor present when we talk about Tom of Finland. In this case, there is a very strong emotional bond with the target audience. Many people's lives have been greatly influenced by Tom of

Finland's art, to the point of life changing decisions regarding self-discovery and self-identification. There are many stories collected at the Tom of Finland Foundation of young guys who would come to appreciate Tom's art for the first time and they would be having some sort of revelation and saying "this is who I really am", so there are very strong inspirational feelings behind Tom of Finland. We feel like that also transcends to our brand, because we use his image strongly in all of our designs and promotions.

Is it costly to use a celebrity for your brand? Through what methods do you finance your celebrity? How is this, in your opinion, the most cost-effective method?

OH - The cost is ok, at least for us, we get a good return on investment. We pay royalties to our celebrities, and even though they are very different types of celebrities, the amount is fairly similar.

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - Ron was paid a small signing fee, and then we agreed that he would get royalties per every bottle sold. Overall, not a big initial investment and not too costly to maintain either.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - We had a licensing deal with the Tom of Finland Foundation. We had to pay upfront what is called a *guaranteed minimum royalty* (GMR) and then, after that would be evened, we would continue to pay them royalties normally (we pay a small percentage of the sale of each bottle). What it means is that we had to pay a determined sum in advance for the license that would later on be retained from future royalty payments until it would add to the total sum already paid. The GMR that we had to pay, even though it wasn't an incredibly big amount, it was still significant. It would have obviously been easier to not have to use that money in that particular way, we could have invested it in sales and promotions in order to increase our success rate since the very beginning.

Overall:

OH - For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) this is probably the best way. You don't have to have a large investment upfront. Bigger companies could consider paying the celebrity upfront and then not worrying about it anymore, but of course this would be depending on the business success-rate forecast. If you keep the celebrity on your payroll, you are keeping them in a way motivated to keep promoting your brand. It is not only about preserving their image but also about a steady income. Furthermore, they would have an incentive to promote the brand even more so that it would keep performing good.

Is it possible to go through negotiation and communication struggles due to a difficult intermediary that might have a certain influence on the celebrity? Have you had any experience on this?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - In his world, Ron is one of the most relaxed people you could imagine. It was pretty straight forward everything at the beginning, no lawyers, no intermediaries. Just a few meetings, contracts, and we were set up. However, at some point we had a few uncomfortable incidents with one of his agents that sort of wanted to have the last word on everything related to Ron. Among other things, his agent used to control Ron Jeremy's personal accounts on different social media platforms, he would abuse his power by not running them properly and sometimes behaving in unethical ways when communicating with fans. By the time Ron decided to break ties with him, the agent refused to give back the social media accounts and continued posting on "Ron's behalf" for a while. The whole thing eventually got solved, by making the incident public and threatening to sue the former agent. Ron had to create new temporary social media accounts until he recovered the original ones. Luckily it all ended up playing in Ron's favour, his fans were really supportive with him in this situation where their idol had become a victim. During the whole period while this agent was around, we lost almost complete access to promoting our brand through Ron Jeremy's social media and reaching his thousands of followers and we also stop getting feedback and answering questions from fans that would write directly to Ron about our products.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - In Tom of Finland's case we don't deal with an individual person only, we deal with a foundation who has a determined set of rules and ways in which they do things.

The complication comes from the fact that they are very protective of Tom of Finland's art and of how Tom of Finland is portrayed in general. We require a lot of approvals from them, which is not necessarily a bad thing, since it helps to maintain the brand's standards and quality. However, in some cases getting answers from them can take too much time which sometimes can present an inconvenience.

In the case that Ron Jeremy or Tom of Finland would be involved in a public scandal or misbehaviour, are there any chances that the bad publicity would have an impact on your brand anyhow? Could it affect the relationship with your business partners and consumers?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - Definitely, if Ron would be involved in a scandal it would directly affect our brand, since we are related by name and by logo directly to him. A year ago, as a matter of fact, when the M2 movement was at its strongest point, due to Ron's line of work, we got some concern from one of our business partners about how this could impact on our brand and the perception of the customers towards us.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - The risk of a scandal with the brand Tom of Finland I believe is less probable at least not at an individual and direct level, since the artist himself is deceased. I would assume that since the foundation is a collective entity that is supposed to follow its own predetermined rules, the chances of being involved in a scandal as a brand would be much smaller. If there would be a case where there was a scandal connected to his art, because of some sort of conservative views, I'll assume there would be support from the community, backing up Tom's art. In that case, the scandal might even be positive. In Tom's case, since it is a community that has been fighting against conservative enemies, they feel united and motivated to defend what is theirs and what they have achieved. About 5 years ago, when Russia was imposing some antigay laws, there were some very strong reactions within the gay communities against Russian Spirits, they were pouring Smirnoff to the gutter.

Do you consider brands that are built on a celebrity's image (like your own) to be more susceptible towards their celebrity's public scandals than brands that just use celebrities as their sponsors but are not built around them?

JL - Of course, if it's just a sponsor, you can terminate their sponsor contract and most of the time that's it. While if the whole brand is built around a celebrity then we have to deal directly with the consequences. I would say that is one of the biggest disadvantages when building a brand that is focused on a celebrity. If Ron or Tom's image would suddenly represent a negative image to the society and the customers, we would seriously need to reconsider what to do with our brand and products.

When a celebrity is involved in a public scandal, the brands linked to them might quickly publicly react against it, in defence of the celebrity or even abstain from making any comment about it. Is it a wise move, as a company, to react as soon as possible towards the scandal that the celebrity linked to your brand might be involved in? Could there be any negative consequences if your brand chooses to do nothing about it?

OH- I think that in theory the best way is to react as soon as possible and to be as open and transparent as possible. In practice, when you decide to open up, the questions can escalate more and more and people might get judgemental towards everything you do as a company, not in a rational way, but in an emotional way. They'll just simply transmit the anger towards the celebrity, to any brand associated with them, especially when the brand is built around them. I guess that, in any case, the worse the scandal would be, the faster we would need to react. It is important in a moral way and obviously in an economic and strategic way as well, to condemn a possible scandal that could be considered as a serious offense from part of the celebrity. We believe that in the worst-case scenario, when one of our celebrities would commit a hypothetical crime, apart from making a public statement, we would consider rebranding publicly.

How would it be to use a deceased celebrity as the image of your brand? Would that help to avoid the risk of scandals?

JL -It is safer, we know that the celebrity won't actively damage their image in any way. On the other side, they can't create any new good publicity either. In any case you are exposed to the behaviour of who owns the trademark of the celebrity, in our case the Tom of Finland Foundation. However, as mentioned earlier, we expect them that as a collective organization we hope that they take better care of their behaviour than an individual person.

There is also the case of when society values change, and the image of a celebrity could be affected by it. In our case this particular scenario has happened in a beneficial way for us. The image of Tom of Finland and his ideals are now defended more than ever before. Only half a century ago people with different sexual orientation would be openly discriminated and oppressed, having a brand like ours, wouldn't stand half a chance to succeed as we do now.

If Ron or the Foundation would choose to associate with many products at once could that distract the attention of the consumers towards your brand? Could consumers stop believing in all of the association of the positive values and furthermore think that Ron is the face of products just because of the money he gets in return?

OH - That would be a case when there would be an inflation of the celebrity's image value, consumers could get distracted and lose focus on your brand, and yes exactly, people would perceive that it is all about money. You could always stand a chance to succeed if the consumers would enjoy your brand because of its quality or appeal, but not necessarily because of its association with a celebrity. It's a very good question, whether is good to have lots of products with the same "brand" so that it keeps you visible, relevant and top of the consumer's mind or is it a tiring thing. At what point does it become tiring for the consumer?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - There have been other brands using Ron's image in the past, and unfortunately, they have not been of a very good quality. Luckily, they have been very small and haven't made it far. If they would be widely available, I fear they could have a negative impact on the perception of our brand. I consider that the quality management of the products that you sublet your brand to, should always maintain certain standards, otherwise it could backfire. Luckily with Tom of Finland, the foundation takes very good care of it.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - In Tom of Finland's case you could see a couple of years ago, that they were coming up with a lot of stuff. Finlayson with its fabrics, Paulig with its coffee, also the Tom of Finland wines, and then us with our organic vodka, etc. There was that feeling

that everything was being done, so the launch was not as interesting anymore. However, so far, the brand keeps being perceived as a quality brand and therefore we maintain a positive standard with our image.

3.2.3 Social media as a business tool

Based on your company's experience, do you consider Social Media to be a relevant channel for promotion and placement of your products? Please elaborate.

JL - Social media is one of our main promotion channels for both of our brands. We constantly share and interact with our consumers through our own accounts but also have the celebrities accounts promoting our products as well. On top of that, our importers in each country do share content and news about our products in their own companies' social media accounts. In just a few countries we even have allowed the importers to create secondary social media accounts for our brands under the same name than the global accounts followed by the name of the country. In this case what we are looking for, in coordination with them, is to share content that is tailored for each country's specific audience, we try to reach and connect better by exploiting cultural elements that could strengthen the bond between our brand and the consumers. They could create content for significant dates in each of the countries or cultural events, etc. Things, that if shared on the global accounts, wouldn't have any relevance to our followers from other countries. They also post and interact with their fans in the local language, so that does not constitute a barrier anymore.

We frequently advertise our brands through our social media accounts, especially through Facebook and Instagram, which are the channels that we have found the most useful among all of the existing platforms. We would have to say that the cost for advertising on these platforms is significantly lower in terms of brand impressions and engagement from the consumer in comparison to more traditional channels where visual elements can be displayed like television or magazines, etc. Another benefit is that consumers can directly interact with our ads and get in touch with us right away. We can also collect first-hand analytics that allows us to understand better what how the ads are working. It also allows us to react faster towards any inquiry or to modify the type of content that we share in case it wouldn't work well. Another thing is that these platforms allow us to target in a very specific way the right audience that we want

to reach by using all sorts of descriptive criteria, in that way we get to make the most out of our money. Other channels are not that economic nor efficient, especially the traditional ones.

Are social media channels a good means to obtain feedback from consumers about your brands?

OH - Certainly, as we were explaining before, consumers can interact with us directly and instantly. Most of the time they come with questions about our products and how to get them in their locations, but in many cases, they write to us to communicate how happy they are with what we are doing. Sure, we have gotten some negative comments as well, but it has always ended up being a result of a miscommunication between one of our importers or a retailer and the consumer. This helps us assess possible issues with awareness or distribution of our brand in particular areas. It allows us to get closer to the consumers and try to offer them the best assistance we can so that they feel heard and appreciated, if they feel pleased, they are likely to grow fonder of our brand.

Do you promote sales of your brands through social media channels?

JL - Oh yes, we do. Most of the ads we run on social media are with the objective of boosting sales directly. What I mean is that we do run some ads only for brand awareness purposes as well, but the majority are looking to reach the right consumer and get them to buy. As we mentioned earlier the cost and efficiency of these channels are to our opinion unbeatable. Since we don't sell to the end consumer directly what we do is that we promote the online shops of our importers or a particular retailer depending on the country or region that we are targeting.

We do also get great amounts of information on the performance of our ads. We get to see how many people get interested in them and how many people clicks on the link to check the product and price. That and in addition to later on getting the sales report from our importers helps us to calculate our return on investment in a better way.

Is it important for your brands that the celebrity linked to each of them has a presence of their own on social media? Does it make any difference for your brand if they are active on their channels?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - It is important, yes. Every fan of the celebrity is a potential consumer of ours, and the more a fan gets to hear from the celebrity they like, the more we are on top of their mind. Ron often shares images and videos of our product on his personal social media accounts and invites his fans to follow us and try "his rums". Immediately after each post we get a nice wave of new followers, every single time. Therefore, the more active he stays and the more he promotes us, the bigger number of new fans and potential consumers we get, which of course is super beneficial.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - With the Tom of Finland Foundation it happens similarly, although they are usually more focused on promoting art. They feature our product less. However, it is still important that they keep promoting themselves and keep being relevant as a brand. Since we are an extension of the Tom of Finland brand, their fans are also our potential fans and consumers. Obviously, we would like them to post more about us, but we still need to work on that. In any case, the fact that they keep the brand relevant is already very important.

Does it have any impact on your brand if Ron Jeremy or the Tom of Finland Foundation have a large number of followers on his own social media?

JL - Well, of course, that's linked to what we were previously explaining. The more fans they have, the more relevant the brand is and the more consumers we could get.

Parting from the concept of parasocial interactions, and based on your brand's experience, do you consider that the parasocial interactions that Ron or the Tom of Finland Foundation might have with their fans might have a positive impact on how they see your brands, since your brands are, after all, an extension of their image?

Ron de Jeremy Rum:

JL - With Ron definitely, we are so connected to him as a brand that many people reach to us on our social media accounts thinking that it is Ron himself the one that will reply to them. His fans feel that his persona and what he represents is something that

rubs on them the more they interact with him. The good thing is that Ron actually likes to hang out with fans whenever he gets approached in person and people often get a direct feedback from him that they are themselves, nice enough people to be around him. Fans can almost feel like they are friends, I mean Ron is easy going and nice in a way that he creates spontaneous friendship feelings on his fans. It makes the fans wanting to know and connect more with Ron and what he does. It all leads to them wanting to try our products and to have something good to say about them in the same way they feel about him.

Tom of Finland Organic Vodka:

OH - In Tom's case the connection is more to his art and his ideals than to the artist himself, because, well he has been deceased for quite a few years already, but his legacy is the one that transcends. What happens in this case is mostly what the work of the foundation can achieve to connect with the followers. The foundation is constantly organizing events of all sorts that are attended and followed by large numbers of followers, many of them are of an interactive and educational kind. Meaning that the fans get to learn more and feel closer to Tom of Finland's ideals, and that they also get to voice their opinions and be heard by the people who work at the foundation. The foundation members normally interact in a very fraternal way with whomever belongs to their community or it is interested in the values they promote and defend. That attitude creates a bond with those who interact with them and makes them feel closer to the brand of Tom of Finland. Same as with Ron Jeremy's example, it all leads to the fans to want to experience pretty much everything related to the brand, including our vodka.

Do you consider that consumers get more involved with your brand when they get personalised responses from you? Please elaborate.

OH - Yes, they do. In the same way they like to be treated nicely by a celebrity, they like the brands they follow to interact with them. We see it all the time, the faster we respond to their messages, the happier they are; they thank us constantly for being so attentive towards their inquiries and explicitly say how they are surprised in a positive way, that we even got back to them in the first place. It shows they are not necessarily used to brands replying to them and that it makes them feel important and noticed. In many cases, we send promotional items to them, for example branded t-shirts, coasters, in Ron de Jeremy's case, a special beard oil which contains rum in the ingredients, so that they also understand that we appreciate their interest. They

definitely appreciate it; we make their day with small kind gestures. You can notice they are really thankful about it, you'll see how afterwards, they'll be liking, commenting and sharing every post we make on social media.

As a result of parasocial interactions do you consider that consumers become more loyal to your brand and are also more inclined to purchase your products? Examples?

JL - Yes, and this goes in connection to what we just mentioned in the previous question. The fans get so excited about our treatment towards them that they promise to buy our products no matter what, later on they will even send us pictures of them with the bottles of rum and vodka, often they also tag us on their on social media publications giving us a shout-out. Through these interactions, the consumers feel part of our community, like they are part of the team, and in away, an indirect way they are. We count on them to spread the voice about our brand and provide positive feedback about our products. We have fans that have been loyal to Ron de Jeremy for years now, they've printed t-shirts, created social media fan pages, baked cakes with our logo, crafted special cocktails to be used with our spirits, etc.

Do you perceive that those consumers with whom your brands and your celebrities have established parasocial interactions with, would be more supportive of your brands there could be a public scandal in which any of them would be involved? Please elaborate.

OH - We consider that the stronger the bond, the more understanding the fans would be. Like in life in general, if your friend does something stupid, you'll try to defend him or support him at least. Think of the Tom of Finland community for example, there's such a strong feeling of belonging and unity that it would take a lot for them to abandon the brand. Same with Ron de Jeremy, we have fans that are so loyal that we believe they would still support us as a company as long as we would always try to rectify the mistake committed.

4 Conclusions

Building a brand can often be a costly and risky project. Conducting a proper market research in order to be certain that consumers' needs and desires will be fulfilled by the

brand's values, is commonly a must-do activity that requires time and money investments from every company. Investing in the promotion of their brands and the placement of their products, are key activities to create a connection with the consumers, raise brand awareness, and encourage the purchase of the brand's products. However, through the research done in this thesis, we have been able to verify that entrepreneurs do not necessarily need to follow these steps to the letter in order to create a successful brand.

Creating a celebrity-focused brand can reduce, if not eliminate completely the time and money invested in the audience market research. Entrepreneurs rely on the image of the celebrity to attract the right type of consumers for their brand. The idea is to reach consumers in a more effective and memorable way than competitors. Celebrities can transmit credibility to the brands that are created around their image. Consumers can perceive them as trustworthy, attractive, inspirational or even as expert individuals in the category field of the products of the brands associated with them; it all grants brand's validation in the consumer's mind.

Using celebrities can also decrease the cost on the promotion of the brand by easily reaching the celebrity's followers base which could be formed by very large numbers of fans. The more a celebrity talks and shares content about the brands linked to them, the more fans and potential consumers the brands might be able to get. The more people that know about the products, the easier it is for the brand awareness to grow. When people are interested in products, they tend to talk about them and so the word-of-mouth spreads to their relatives and contacts in general. It represents a free element of promotion of the brand that helps reducing the promotion costs for the company.

When creating celebrity-focused brands the products do not need to be related to the same industry in where the celebrities achieved their fame. As a matter of fact, not being able to understand the connection in between the celebrity and the products, can cause surprise and awaken curiosity among the consumers, getting them more interested in discovering the brand. The positive values that are perceived by the audience in a celebrity, are expected to be transmitted to the image of the brands that are focused on them; consumers should develop a positive value association in between both of them, brand and celebrity. However, the same thing can happen with negative characteristics of the celebrity, brands can be affected by it. This does not necessarily mean that negative associations would always be harmful to the brands.

Nevertheless, entrepreneurs need to be aware that it could represent a challenge and thus, they should find a way on how to use it to their advantage.

Like any other business, celebrity-focused brands are not exempt from challenges. While it is wise to consider some of the challenges that can emerge from this particular type of enterprise, research has proven that there are ways to manage these risks, making it worth to create a celebrity-focused brand after all. Financing a celebrity can be quite costly, especially if the company intends to make a single payment for their collaboration. However, there are more cost-effective ways to use a celebrity for your brand e.g. paying royalties to the celebrity or having them own shares of the company. Both of these methods not only would decrease the investment required but would also guarantee that celebrities would keep promoting the brand on their channels since, the better the brand would work, the more income they would receive. Problematic people that are close to a celebrity could also jeopardize the communications with them. They could have the celebrity's ear and be influential on the way they negotiate contracts. Having direct communication with the celebrity and following their rules, can make companies earn their celebrity's trust after all.

Celebrities themselves could be the ones causing the problems as well. They can misbehave and be involved in public scandals; they could end up affecting their reputation and the image of the brands built around them to even extreme cases where brands would go bankrupt. Unfortunately, the brands that are built around celebrities are directly affected by any scandal the celebrity could be involved in, compared to brands that just use celebrities as endorsers, but do not owe their reputation to them. In some cases, companies can manage reduce the amount of bad publicity by reacting towards the incidents the celebrities might be involved in. Depending on the severity of the situation, sometimes it might be better to remain quiet and wait how things unfold, although when the scandals get too serious, the sooner a brand makes a public statement, the better chances the brand has to distance themselves from negative consequences. In the worst-case scenario, rebranding might be the necessary solution. Celebrities can also get greedy and choose to associate themselves with many brands at once. This could affect their credibility with the consumers, who could end up not associating any positive value anymore between the celebrity and a brand in particular. They would now be inclined to believe that the reasons for a celebrity to be connected to a brand are just purely economic. The situation could be even worse if the some of the brands would be of poor quality; consumers could now associate the celebrity and the rest of the brands around him, with that particular characteristic.

Another advantage that companies can rely on, is the possibility of establishing parasocial interactions with the consumers not only from the brand's position but also and especially through the celebrity they are connected to. Personalizing the way in which a brand or the celebrity interacts with the consumers and fans, leads to bigger a level of bonding in between all the parties. Fans that have developed parasocial interactions with celebrities are more inclined to buy the products from brands that portray the image of the celebrity. They appreciate individual interactions with their idols, it makes them more loyal towards them, wanting to be aware of things that relate to them, including the brands associated to them. The more frequent celebrities share content about them and the more personal information they disclose, the more present they will be in their fans' mind, and as an extension to that, the more present the brands related to them will be in the fans' mind as well.

Direct and indirect encouragement towards the audience to generate free media constitutes another key element to have in consideration, especially for SMEs who can make the most out of the content generated by the fans instead of having to invest money in creating extra content of their own. The audience tend to be motivated to interact with a brand's publications if they are interested in the products that are being offered. In addition to that, the brand's followers are motivated to create content if the chances would be that they could get publicly recognized by the brand or, even better, by the celebrity behind it.

Nowadays, that technology has made us all interconnected, having an online presence has proven to be a necessary requirement in order to reach the consumer in a more efficient and cost-effective way than ever before. Social media platforms, counting on a big and growing number of users, have become one of the most popular channels for celebrities and brands to be in touch with their consumers. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter help an easier interaction with followers that leads to a strengthening of the parasocial relationships in between them, the celebrities and the brands around them. The online channels enhance the effect that fans can have when spreading word-of-mouth since now they have the tools to reach much larger amounts of users than in the physical world. These channels have also proven to be a better means to advertise to consumers in comparison to the more traditional ones. They represent a new way to advertise and promote brands for much cheaper prices and with higher level of detailed when targeting the desired consumer. In addition to that, online channels allow the placement of products in a more accessible way for consumers than on physical locations. Consumers can, now read information and

reviews about products and purchase online from whatever region in the world as long as a brand can deliver it to them. This new technologies allow smaller brands to have bigger chances of reaching consumers and to have a relevant impact on them depending mostly on the type of content that they use and the value of their products; it makes it fairer when competing against big brands that could have a much greater advantage when trying to do the same through traditional promotion and placement channels.

Even if you are a small brand you can still make in a competitive market while reducing costs on your brand building, market research and placement and promotion of your brand. By building a celebrity-focused brand, utilising online tools -especially social media channels-, motivating the audience to generate free media about your products, exploiting the positive effect that parasocial relationships can have on consumers and by having clear alternatives on how to manage the risks that can exist by dealing with a celebrity brands can not only succeed, but also challenge big companies in their industry category.

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