

“THE BRANDS, RANGING FROM HEELS TO CELLULITE REDUCTION CREAM, MAY HAVE BEEN FINANCIALLY SUCCESSFUL, BUT IN THE LONG RUN THEY HAVE BUILT ZERO TRACTION IN TERMS OF BRAND STAYING POWER”

BRANDING By Daniel Scheffler (@danielscheffler)

Advertisers have for decades attempted to quantify and qualify the use of celebrities in their marketing campaigns by gauging the influence on buying behaviour



Celebrity endorsement — does it work?

THERE HAVE been no conclusive studies that show that celebrity endorsement actually is an important attributing factor to the success of a brand. If a brand is actually let's say, that great, then a celebrity will be completely superfluous. But then again there is the magic of abominable Kim Kardashian.

FALL FROM GRACE

With three of the world's biggest sportsmen being disgraced in a matter of a few years the questions around fame, testimonials and their relevance are to be raised. The Davie Brown Index (DBI) is said to assist with a list of more than 3 000 celebrities whereby the independent index (tailored for brand marketers) showcases consumer perceptions and the celebrity's ability to influence brand affinity. The segments for the index to collect data include: Appeal, Breakthrough, Trendsetter, Influence, Trust, Endorsement and Aspiration. Certainly a useful tool to ascertain value, but it still does not reflect actual worth. Let's look at some sports examples. First there was Tiger Woods, the golf world's darling who could do no wrong that managed to philander across town while his wife was sitting pretty at home. He did apologise and sought help in the form of 'rehab'. His actions resulted in Woods appearing in the cover of *Vanity Fair* and he won the hearts of fans yet again. Lance Armstrong was next with a doping scandal that was propelling the man to



victory every year. He, although Oprah Winfrey gave him his chance, did not seem to want to apologise and will probably never win back his devotees. But what these two men do to their sponsors, the brands that were endorsed by them is still not clear. It presents the question of whether scandal (usually something dishonest) affects the merit of the person's performance. In the case of Armstrong it certainly did, he enhanced his capabilities in an illegal manner. But Woods, not so much.

The latest scandal, of Olympic and Paralympic star Oscar Pistorius, has brought this conversation to the fore in a slightly different manner. Although at the time of writing this article no conclusive decision had been made regarding his situation where he is accused of killing his reality TV star girlfriend Reena Steenkamp. The tragedy has certainly left a bad taste for his supporters. But will his ever-loyal brands stick with him? So far some have. Although Nike was first

to pull their support — a billboard with Pistorius and a byline, 'I am bullet in the chamber' was quickly removed from his website as well as from billboards across the country.

NO CELEBRITY NEEDED

But how much damage can bad behaviour of such endorsed celebrities really do to a brand? Interestingly enough as reflected on the Interbrand Top 100 Brands list, the biggest on the list do not have celebrity endorsements of any kind: Toyota, Disney, Google etc. They don't need a celebrity, who is potentially volatile, to impute to success. Kim Kardashian has built her fame, think sex tape, on not being a good girl that behaved in an honourable way for brands to align themselves with her. But she has represented big, and small, brands across America with seemingly great success sales wise. The brands, ranging from heels to cellulite reduction cream, may have been financially successful, but in the long run they have built zero traction in terms of brand staying power. Kim, like Paris Hilton and some Van Der Bilt girl before her in the 80s, will fade and the brands will dwindle with her.

NO SANDY BEACH

One of the fundamentals of brand building is surely trust. If you cannot trust your brand to be aligned with someone that is 'trustworthy' or an 'upstanding citizen' of

some kind why would you stick it out with the brand. The very fickle nature of consumers is therefore in bed with Kim and probably for this reason alone. Twitter is a perfect paradise for celebrities, like finger-in-every-pie Ryan Seacrest, to flaunt their affinity for brands and get paid to do that. According to Bloomberg social media spending will rise to almost \$10 billion by the year 2016. But consumers are smarting up and know what money has changed hands. Perhaps the lesson that if you're willing to take the risk by building a brand that is essentially built on a sandy beach vs. building it on some serious foundation, then yes, a celebrity endorsement can be fantastic. But real brands with a real offering and a commitment to their followers can build their brand by giving the consumer a true and honest reflection of what the brand is about without the noise of a famous person cluttering the glitter of their offering. Because it is just so obvious that if Jessica Simpson, in her best non-bimbo voice, promotes Weight Watchers you know that she's getting paid for it. And when she can't lose the weight then the brand's merit comes under scrutiny and consumers are left thinking perhaps the millions you have spent on a celebrity should rather have gone to creating an even better product?

Daniel Scheffler is the owner of The Idea Consultancy. He studied at VEGA, B Comm Marketing/Communication and B Honours Branding. His focus now is on management consulting, idea generation and strategic planning.