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## Celebrity Endorsement Impact on Non Profit Organizations: A Case Study of Angelina Jolie's visits to Syrian refugee Camps in Jordan

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**Abstract:** in a world torn by natural disasters and human conflicts, Non-Profit Organizations spare no effort in deploying all available resources to create a distinct brand identity. In essence, this competitive advantage helps in achieving NPOs goals and objectives, generally framed into raising public awareness, soliciting donations and influencing decision makers. In this paper, qualitative and quantitative research has been conducted to measure the impact of Angelina Jolie's endorsement on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) operating in Jordan, and the impact of her numerous visits to Syrian refugee camps and host communities in Jordan. Empirical findings concluded that although celebrity endorsement drastically raises public awareness and increases visibility, but could not successfully nor significantly act as a sole mechanism for fundraising. Yet, it has been deduced that, in this particular case, individuals with high involvement with the NPO were more likely to donate funds and volunteer as a result to celebrity endorsement. Hence, it is recommended that UNHCR invests more time and effort in raising awareness to those less involved, to convert them into supporters and potential donors. For this case study, it has been concluded that Source Attractiveness was the most important element for respondents, whereas UNHCR's selection model had largely relied on the four models combined; Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, the Match-Up Hypothesis and the Meaning Transfer Model. Through this study, it has been established that the celebrity endorser in this specific case overshadowed the agency. It is therefore highly recommended to enhance UNHCR's visibility during such activities.

**Keywords:** *Celebrity Endorsement, Non Profit Organizations, Jordan.*

### Introduction

The eruption of the Syrian crisis in March 2011 had a visible and distinct footprint on highlighting human rights in Jordan. The massive and sudden influx of Syrian refugees into the small, resource-limited country necessitated the rapid intervention of numerous national and international humanitarian aid agencies, whose primary role was to protect refugees and guarantee their access to basic human rights. One key agency that has been operating worldwide since 1950 (UNHCR, 2017) and in Jordan since 1991 (UN, 2017) rolled up its sleeves in preparation to fulfill its promise of saving the lives of those forced to flee; the UNHCR. The UNHCR has appointed renowned actress Angelina Jolie as its special envoy in April 2012, after years of dedicated service as UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador (Wikipedia, 2017).

Several authors (Dimed and Joulyana, 2005, Fill 2005, Roy, 2012, Spry et al, 2011, Domino, 2003) emphasized on the important of celebrities in advertisements and enhancing corporate and product image. Fill (2005) lists four main types of spokespeople who deliver the message and are described as the source: the expert, the celebrity, the CEO and the consumer. According to McCracken

(1989), a celebrity endorser can be defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (p. 310).

A celebrity is a familiar and known personality, scoring high on a the level of public recognition, thus giving them a certain image (Awasthi and Choraria, 2015). Alternatively, celebrity endorsement could back fire or prove to be less effective than anticipated. For example, resentment could arise if consumers believed that the fees paid to the celebrity might increase the cost of the product (Cooper as cited in Domino, 2003), or if the “fit” between the endorser and the product is not visible or strong (Till and Shimp, 1998), or if the celebrity’s image changes for any scandalous reason (Erdogan, 1999), or spurs negative publicity resulting from inappropriate behavior (Clow and Baack, 2004). Other reasons might be when the celebrity takes advantage of the endorsement to promote their own personal brand, and develop a need to differentiate themselves, gain publicity and promote their image, thus coming off as selfish (Petty et al. 1983), or lastly in the case of an overexposed celebrity; where the more products the celebrity endorses, the less credible (Tripp et al., 1994 and Clow and Baack, 2004) or the less trustworthy they seem (Dimed and Joulyana, 2005).

In the non-profit sector, the concept of celebrity activism is common, defined as “celebrities supporting social causes by endorsing campaigns aimed at raising issue awareness or funds with the general public” (Van den Bulck, Panis, Van Aelst, & Hardy, cited from de los Salmones & Dominguez, 2016). Similar to product endorsement, some celebrity endorsement might create negative impact when it is concerned with humanitarian issues, such as poverty, animal and child rights (Wilson, 2015). Angelina Jolie; a renowned American actress and director, was appointed as UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2001 for numerous reasons; her powerful cultural and political status and universal popularity, her love for children demonstrated in three adopted children (Maddox, from Cambodia, Zahara, from Ethiopia, and Pax, from Vietnam) and a personal dedication and financial commitment to the cause of UNHCR demonstrated in the largest and one of many to come individual donations to the humanitarian agency; one million dollars to help Afghan refugees (UNHCR, 2017).

The purpose of this research it to measure the impact of celebrity Angelina Jolie’s endorsement on UNHCR, in light of her fourth visit in 2016 to Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, on the agency itself and Jordanians/Syrians residing in the country. The research aimed at identified whether Angelina Jolie was a good choice for celebrity endorsement, whether the actress visits were successful in terms of creating awareness, having actual influence in driving more donations, and increasing the number of volunteers helping Syrians in the camps who are in great need of such help, the following questions helped in reaching the research objectives:

## **Literature Review**

Solomon et al. (2006) list the five elements of the communication model that are necessary to achieve the communication and change consumers’ attitudes. The Source who includes and encodes a meaning into the Message, which is transmitted through a specific Medium, the Receiver then interprets the Message, and gives Feedback back to the Source. Ohanian (1990) pins importance on the credibility of the source to effectively relay the message to the receiver. Belch and Belch (2003) on further research on credibility name the main characteristics that reinforce the celebrity’s credibility as trustworthiness in terms of honesty and believability and expertise in terms of knowledge.

### **Source Credibility**

Erdogan (1999) discusses two variables that affect the endorser’s credibility; expertise (knowledge, experience and skills) and trustworthiness (honesty, integrity and believability). Bergkvist et al (2016) found that endorsers who are perceived as experts are more persuasive and

tend to have a positive impact on the brand's image and produce greater agreement with the subject at hand, as opposed to non-experts.

### **Source Attractiveness**

Source attractiveness is not confined to physical appearance, but also includes similarity; which is the resemblance between the endorser and the target audience, familiarity; which is knowledge of the source through exposure and visibility, and lastly liking; which is the target audience's level of affection felt towards the endorser (Belch and Belch 2003). Kahle and Homer (1985) have proved that physical attractiveness of the endorser has a positive effect on the target audience, in terms of purchase behavior. Nevertheless, Sliburyte (2009) depends on the type of product. If the promoted product is a PC, for example, source attractiveness is not a significant behavior inducer.

### **Match-up Hypothesis**

Solomon (2002) confers that fame alone might not be the only element needed for an endorser to be successful. Therefore, this hypothesis assumes that to have an effective communication, the endorser and the brand should "fit", especially in terms of perceived attributes. The higher the match-up between brand and celebrity endorser, the greater the positive attitude towards both, especially in terms of product awareness and recall (Misra and Beatty 1990). Hence, although physical attractiveness and credibility are key elements in the selection of the celebrity, but the congruence or match-up between the celebrity and the promoted product should be present and visible. (Jain, 2011).

### **Meaning Transfer Model**

Martin (1996) argues that the company needs to assess the consumers' needs, link it to its symbolic features, then select the endorser who best fits these meaning, as he/she will be able to generate a more positive response. Wilson (2015) found that a celebrity alone is not capable of soliciting funds, support, donations, or human resources for the benefit of a charity, but might prove to be very effective in generating awareness and presenting appeals or running campaigns. To optimize the benefits of a celebrity endorser for a charity organization, the celebrity should have credibility, integrity, experience and personal connection to the cause they support. Salmones et al (2013) found that for a celebrity to exert influence over audience in the NPO context, they must be credible. Additionally, the better people like them, the more effective the communication.

### **Negative Publicity for NPO's**

Crossland (2015) proposes that if the endorser does not believe nor share the NPO's values, vision and mandates, then the endorsement might seem invalid. Unfortunately, and in some instances, the NPO or organization has little control over the endorser (Tom et al. citing from Crossland 2015), who might harm the brand image or the consumers' purchase intentions if their actions contradict with their endorsement.

### **The Overexposed Endorser**

Ilicic and Webster, (2011) mention that a celebrity who endorses several products is seen as indistinctive, whereas when the celebrity endorses one product, individuals display higher interest in product purchase, respond better to promotional message, and regard product and advert more favourably (Mowen and Brown, 1981). McSweeney (2004) suggest that satiation can occur from psychological processes, such as habituation; "a decrease in responsiveness to a stimulus that is presented repeatedly or for a prolonged time", or "a form of learning in which an organism decreases or ceases to respond to a stimulus after repeated presentations" Wikipedia (2017), or a behavioural response decrement that results from repeated stimulation and that does not involve sensory adaptation/sensory fatigue or motor fatigue (Rankin et al. 2009).

### **Involvement Levels**

Involvement is explained as the personal importance of an object for a person, (Petty et al., 1983) or the personal interest in a specific situation as a result of past experience, values, needs or personal features. These are the determinants to the depth, extensiveness and complexity of the

consumer's behaviour (Chakravarti & Janiszewski, 2003). Petty et al. (1983) concluded that if an advert included a product of high involvement, the content and information presented were a persuasive determinant in the individuals' critical attitudes. In products with low involvement the endorser was the important element in shaping attitudes and purchase intentions. (Domino, 2003). The above is of significance to NPOs when considering Atay's argument (2001) P.129, if the involvement is low, the individual might support the endorsers' values, yet, when involvement is high, the individual's own values and beliefs are of merit. On the other hand, and as aforementioned, celebrity endorsement in NPOs is very debatable since receivers may have doubts about their credibility, honesty and opportunistic behaviour, seeking publicity and visibility (Samman et al., 2008).

## **Methodology**

In this research, an integration of the qualitative and quantitative methods was adopted to draw general conclusions on the effectiveness of celebrity endorser Jolie on the Syrian crisis. Close-ended questionnaires containing 22 questions on a 5 point Likert scale representing "Totally Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, and Totally Disagree" were formed in Arabic and distributed through the probability sampling, based on the principle of randomization, to 200 random Jordanian participants and 50 random Syrian participants. Respectively, 182 and 30 filled and valid questionnaires were returned. Questionnaires were tested on two Jordanians and one Syrian and valid feedback was taken into account, two university instructors gave their opinion of the research instruments questionnaires and in-depth interview questions, their comments and recommendations were taken into consideration which resulted in amending the instruments. Additionally, two interviews with senior UNHCR communication were conducted. One was through Skype with a communications Advisor in Geneva and the second one through telephone conversation with a field worker who accompanied Jolie on her visit to the Zaatari camp.

## **Results and Discussion**

General findings indicate numerous similarities and shared opinions between Jordanians and Syrians. In assessing the attributes of Jolie, Likability scored the highest, followed by Attractive, Familiarity and Trustworthiness in both nationalities (Source Attractiveness and Credibility), the results show that Angelina Jolie enjoys the characteristics of a successful endorser having scored high on the above mentioned characteristics, 78.2% of the respondents believe Jolie is likable, 67.85% see her as attractive, 58.24% familiar, and 56.04% see her as trustworthy, however Jolie scored less in favourable 46.15% and knowledgeable apparently because they believe that she depends on her personality, looks and famousness in endorsement rather than her knowledge.

In a different question, 131 respondents out of 182 regarded Jolie as a very good fit to UNHCR (72%) and similarly 130 respondents out of 182 regard Jolie as most Trustworthy (71.4%), those characteristics show that choosing Jolie for endorsement was a very good choice by UNHCR, trustworthiness is a main element in choosing the endorser as explained earlier.

The overall perception of her credibility was excellent with 32.4% of the respondents, and very good with a percentage of 33%, 55.4% believe that Jolie has an excellent and very good credibility, only 5.5% of the respondents see her credibility level as poor. Chart three proves that Jolie has very strong credibility reflecting positively on the endorsement process.

The overall perception of her knowledge of UNHCR and refugees was also very good: 70 out of 182 respondents, with a percentage of 38.5%, and her having excellent knowledge of UNHCR and refugees 26.4%, hence 64.9% recognise Jolie as having very good and excellent knowledge of UNHCR and refugees, and therefore is an excellent choice to endorse syrian refugee camps in Jordan and enhancing awareness and need for increasing donations for UNHCR to be able to improve the living standards of Syrian refugees in various Syrian camps in Jordan.

The overwhelming majority; 147 respondents out of 182 (80.70%) agreed that people are profoundly influenced by celebrity endorsement, in general, in terms of raising awareness of cause; 142 respondents out of 182 (78%), but in a lesser degree in motivating people to donate money; 68 respondents out of 182 (47.25%), and volunteer time; 89 respondents out of 182 (48.90%), less than 50% of the respondent believe that Jolie's visits were successful in terms of urging people to donate money or volunteer in helping Syrian refugees in any way, from the analysis of the collected data we have seen that people understand that Angelina was the right choice for creating awareness, but did not achieve actual results on the ground.

In the specific case of Angelina Jolie for the benefit of UNHCR, 135 respondents out of 182 (74.18%) agreed that her visits and endorsement generated and heightened awareness of UNHCR brand reflecting positively on her UNHCR mission. In an interview with UNHCR, the media advisor highlighted the role a celebrity plays not only in raising the profile of the agency, but also in generating public support, enhancing donor relations and demonstrating the expenditure efficiency. Negatively, 106 respondents out of 182 respondents (58.2%) noted that Jolie's visit overshadowed the visibility of UNHCR on her visits to the Syrian Refugee camps. Chart 6 draws the comparison between the two. In the UNHCR interview, the media advisor stated that UN agencies deploy the fame of the celebrity for their use and benefit. Hence, the issue of overshadowing the brand is not as significant as the mission of the agency itself, which boils down to saving lives.

The only divergence in this category of questions is the Syrians' motivation by a celebrity endorsement to donate money to NPOs, where 14 respondents out of 30 (46.66%) was Neutral. This is understandable as they are in an abnormal emergency setting and financial hardship.

In an assessment of UNHCR's main attributes, it was mostly described as an Honest and Favourable organization, whereas Transparent and Reliable fell at the other end of the spectrum. It is worth mentioning that the Not Involved and Know Nothing About UNHCR respondents were the ones rating UNHCR as not Transparent (13 out of 28 respondents), nor Credible (9 out of 18 respondents).

General findings also indicated that the perception of UNHCR was NOT affected by Angelina Jolie's breakup with Brad Pitt (142 out of 182 Jordanians respondents (78.02%) in comparison to 28 out of 30 Syrians respondents (93.33%), the received data indicates that the marital or personal social status of Jolie does not have influence on the endorsed organisation as apparently is not related to the organisation's activities.

## **Conclusion**

The primary focus of this paper is to investigate and assess the impact of celebrity endorsement and Jolie's visits to Syrian refugee camps in Jordan. It has been concluded through UNHCR interview that celebrity endorsement attracts publicity and enhances visibility, and through the questionnaires that it drastically increases public awareness about the NPO and its cause. It has also been concluded that while money and time donations were confirmed as a result of celebrity endorsement at the beginning of the questionnaire - although with minor deviation from neutral affect – the results shifted towards negative when presented with the specific case of donating money or volunteering time for the benefit of Syrian refugees as a direct result to Jolie's endorsement and visits. Therefore, an NPO should not rely solely on celebrity endorsement for soliciting charitable giving; whether time, resources or money, but should combine it with other fundraising mechanisms, and this is in line with the research findings of (Domino, 2003).

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