

PAZARLAMADA ÜNLÜ KULLANIMI STRATEJİSİ: TÜRK HAVA YOLLARI ÖRNEĞİ

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ÖZ: Günümüz rekabetçi pazar ortamında, ünlülerin ürün ve markaların pazarlama iletişiminde kullanılması oldukça popüler olan bir pazarlama tekniğidir. Ünlü kullanımı birçok marka tarafından onaylanmış; hem yerel hem de küresel pazarlardaki tüketicilere ulaşmak için kullanılan güvenilir pazarlama stratejilerinden biridir. Araştırma bulguları, ünlü kullanımının ya da ünlü desteğinin etkili bir şekilde kullanılması halinde satın alma niyetini etkilediği ve satışları artırdığını göstermekte olup, buna ek olarak tüketiciler arasında marka bilinirliğini de artırmaktadır. Bu makale, ünlü kullanımı stratejisinin kültürel temellerini anlam transferi modeli bağlamında açıklamayı amaçlamakta olup, Türkiye'nin önde gelen havayolu firmalarından biri olan Türk Hava Yolları (THY) markasının ünlü kullanımı stratejisini analiz etmektedir. Türk Hava Yolları firması, globalleşme stratejileri çerçevesinde dünyaca ünlü küresel isimler ve kurumlar ile ortak çalışmalar yapmış ve bu çalışmalar neticesinde olumlu sonuçlar elde etmiş başarılı bir Türk markasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Global Pazarlama, Pazarlama İletişimi, Ünlü Kullanımı, Havayolları, Türk Hava Yolları

Makalenin türü: Araştırma

Jel Sınıflandırması: M3, M31

DOI: 10.54969/abuijss.1069452

Geliş tarihi: 07.02.2022/ **Kabul Tarihi:** 27.06.2022/ **Yayın Tarihi:** 05.07.2022

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT STRATEGY IN MARKETING: TURKISH AIRLINES CASE

ABSTRACT: In today's highly competitive market, celebrity endorsement is a widely used marketing technique in marketing communications; a credible strategy endorsed by brands not only used to attract and engage target customers in local markets but also used to reach out the global communities in the overseas markets. Research findings show that celebrity endorsement, when used effectively, increases purchase intention and sales; enabling brand familiarity and awareness among consumers. This paper aims to explain the cultural foundations of the celebrity endorsement in the context of meaning transfer model; concurrently examining the Turkish Airlines (THY) celebrity endorsement strategy; a full service carrier operating in Turkey. THY proved itself as a successful brand in Turkey in the use of global celebrities in integrated marketing communications while reaching up to the global customer base; in summary ended up with positive outcomes.

Key Words: Global Marketing, Marketing Communications, Celebrity Endorsement, Airlines, Turkish Airlines

Type of article: Research

Jel Classification: M3, M31

DOI: 10.54969/abuijss.1069452

Received: 07.02.2022/ **Accepted:** 27.06.2022/ **Published:** 05.07.2022

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Kaynak gösterimi için:

Kantarcioğlu, B.(2022). Celebrity Endorsement Strategy In Marketing: Turkish Airlines Case, Antalya Bilim Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 3(1), ss.66-83.DOI: 10.54969/abuijss.1069452

1. INTRODUCTION

Our brains like the familiar ones. The more consumers become familiar with the brand, the likelihood of consumers' willingness to prefer the brand increases. All over the world, celebrities, whether we like them or not, are the popular ones that are high profile, known and followed by millions or billions of people. Yet, celebrity endorsement, as part of the marketing communications, is a strategy widely used by many of the brands while promoting their brands in designing their marketing strategies and PR campaigns. Recently, this widely used strategy along with the proliferation of digital communication channels has been gaining popularity not only in traditional marketing but also in digital marketing. Celebrity endorsement strategy has been used by major companies and these companies invest in their brand equity to align endorsers' public identity with their brand identity (Erdogan, 1999). With celebrities promoting their brands, companies become part of the consideration set of the consumers along with high recall and recognition rates. Through endorsed product and services, brands can increase awareness and familiarity. Hence, consumers feel sympathetic towards brands if they somehow relate to the endorsed celebrity or admire the celebrity. Celebrities have been long used by corporate marketing teams to enhance brand image, to gain attention and engage consumers with the brand (Dean & Biswas, 2011).

Celebrity endorsement is a global phenomenon used in marketing communications and the use of celebrities endorsed by brands and products dates back to 19th century. With the emergence of cinema, radio and TV within the 20th century, celebrity endorsement becomes popular; an effective advertising technique while marketing to masses both in domestic and international markets (Erdogan, 1999). As an integral aspect of modern day marketing, this widely known technique became a powerful strategy to stimulate desire; building brand awareness among consumers, strengthening the brand image and sustaining credibility in promoting products and services to the masses (McCracken, 1989). In the last 20 years, there are celebrities all over the world who signed endorsement deals for major brands. Among these celebrities, most of them highly admired and followed by audiences such as Britney Spears, Beyoncé and Pink agreement with Pepsi for 50 million US Dollars, Charlize Theron agreement with Dior for 55 Million Dollars, Serena Williams agreement with Nike for 55 million US Dollars, and the record breaking of all times Michael Jordan agreement with Nike for 250 million US Dollars (gobankingrates.com, 2021).

In modern day marketing, with the rise of the digital era, consumers are increasingly exposed to different communication messages throughout different channels by many brands which resulted in huge competition in attracting customers' attention and made it harder to keep them engaged with the products and services. (Houtari & Hamari, 2012). At this point, using a celebrity as a promotional tool becomes a major strategic move for many companies. Celebrities; due to their likeability and high profile, may help the marketing message stand out of the communication clutter (Atkin & Block, 1985). Moreover, both marketing practitioners and researchers reached a common belief that the endorser's character also has an effect on the persuasiveness of the intended message (Ohanian, 1990). As a result, the endorsement of celebrities used by brands increased quite extensively over the past years and estimated that one out of four advertising or PR campaign utilize celebrities in promoting products or services (Shimp, 1997). It has been observed that in a

situation where consumer is being exposed to various messages, one product's message backed up with a celebrity in the advertising campaign is believed to be that endorsed product will have more purchases and the endorsed message is more appealing than the one with no celebrity is used (Clark & Horstman, 2003). A survey published by J. Clement in 2019 showed that more than 30% of internet users ranged from 16-35 age group find a product or service through celebrity endorsed advertising (statista.com, 2017)

It has been evident from the literature that celebrity endorsement, congruent with the brand identity and the product, has a positive effect on shaping the attitude and behavioral purchase intentions of consumers regarding that brand or product or sometimes vice versa. In the field of marketing, it is widely believed that a popular and likeable celebrity promoting certain brand's products comes with a higher degree of publicity. With the rise in publicity, favorability of brand associations and customer recall/recognition ability compared with when this technique is not used increases (Malik & Gupta, 2014).

1. The Definition of Celebrity Endorsement

In literature, celebrity and celebrity endorsement have various definitions. Widely used meaning of a celebrity is defined as a famous person who is well known and gets lots of public attention. McCracken, in his seminal work published in 1989, brought a new perspective to celebrity endorsement definition and defined celebrity endorser as; "Any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken, 1989).

According to Schlecht, the definition of celebrity has twofold aspects; first the recognition of the celebrity by public or masses and second, the common characteristics observed in celebrities such as attractiveness, high public awareness, likeability and their lifestyle -apart from the commonly accepted social norms- make celebrities perceived different from the rest of the community (Schlecht, 2003). Another definition of celebrity endorsement is provided by Khatri emphasizing the expertise aspect of the celebrity endorsement that expertise in a specific field of interest. Hence, it may not be a necessary condition for endorsement; rather celebrities may lend their names to products or services that they have no expertise with (Khatri, 2006). Movie stars, sports athletes, singers, performers, entertainers, musicians, and even politicians or in some cases fictional celebrities (such as Ronald McDonald) are accepted as different types of celebrities (Khatri, 2006). Celebrities act as hired spokesman of the brands and they are employed by brands where celebrities' personality is being transferred to a product or brand (Kaikati, 1987).

In today's digital world, with the rise of social media, celebrities become very approachable and have huge influence over their followers. According to Foong (2014) article, on a national or international level, celebrities should act as opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are the people that consumers trust and get an approval while purchasing a good or service. Opinion leaders can shape how consumers' view a product or service. Celebrities are not only admired but also imitated by consumers. When executed effectively, celebrity endorsement can be a powerful tool to shape the ideas of the consumers and how they view the brands. Regardless of the communication medium, from mass communication to customized communication, celebrity endorsement can take place in many forms in various mediums. As an example, the majority of celebrities can use branded products or services in their social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter posts; as part of

microblogging (Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). Besides, celebrity endorsement strategy is not only used for consumer goods, but also in consumer services, business to business products and services, in non-profit organizations and in non-commercial services. The brand value added by celebrities is perceived immediately and seen obvious. Using a celebrity for the product and services along with protection under legal contracts brings a legitimacy to the endorsement process. When the power and legitimacy of the celebrity name backing it up is high, immediate response in the form of growth in brand value becomes inevitable (Olenski, Forbes, 2016).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Celebrity Endorsement

While reviewing the literature, keyword searches were made by using “celebrity endorsement”, “celebrity”, “endorsement” “global marketing” “endorsement models”; mainly focusing on the highly cited articles published in Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Behavior, Journal of Marketing Management, Journal of Global Marketing, International Journal of Advertising through Google Scholar and Web of Science database. In Web of Science database, between years 1983-2022, there are 844 publications indexed with the keyword “celebrity endorsement”. Out of these publications, there are 400 articles in the field of Business, 151 articles in the field of Communications, 117 in the field of Management and 91 articles in the field of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism and the rest of the publications settles in various areas of research. In Google Scholar, there are far more than 40.000 results with the keyword “celebrity endorsement” between years 1983-2022 (google scholar, 2022). In Google trends worldwide search between years 2004-2020, celebrity endorsement and related searches such as “definition”, “meaning” and “examples” are on the rise and the countries such as Ghana, Singapore, Nigeria, Philippines and Pakistan are the countries given on top in interest by region (trendsgoogle.com, 2022).

The celebrity endorsement as a powerful marketing strategy became popular with the intensive use of traditional marketing channels such as TV, radio and billboards. It can be inferred that choosing the right celebrity for the right product and service (or brand in general terms) is an important task for marketers. As a solid and widely accepted strategy, it may come with rewards along with its risks. As a result, understanding the models explaining the endorsement process is a crucial task for the researchers both in academia and in practice. So far, regarding the prior research on understanding the celebrity endorsement process, there are three major streams of research behind celebrity endorsement; Source Credibility Model, Source Attractiveness Model, and The Meaning Transfer Model proposed by various researchers (Erdogan, 1999).

In that sense, in order to grasp an understanding of the literature regarding celebrity endorsement, we dated back to year 1989; where many of the influential and relevant articles about celebrity endorsement used citation back to the infamous article of McCracken G., “Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process” published in the Journal of Consumer Behavior in which celebrity endorsement topic is being reviewed through the models of endorsement framework. The article has been cited by 4,750 times in Google Scholar; making the research one of the most seminal works in this particular research of topic (googlescholar, 2022). The article analyzes the celebrity endorsement process and put forward the meaning transfer model as an alternative to the existing models explaining celebrity endorsement such as source credibility model and

source attractiveness model (McCracken, 1989). The model explains the endorsement process in 3 major phases; the existing celebrity image perceived by the consumers, the celebrity image transferred to the product and lastly the transfer of the meaning from the product to the consumer (McCracken, 1989). In other words, the meaning transfer model suggests that an endorser should include a set of features or skills set coherent with those of the brand for meaning to be transferred (Hollensen, 2012). Regarding meaning transfer model, Jain (2016) proposed shifting the perspective to the process of endorsement and scholars studying this particular topic need to start first with what a celebrity means to a consumer. Prior research explaining the celebrity endorsement process mostly focused on the reciprocal meaning that a brand and a celebrity transfers to each other throughout the endorsement process. In other words, many of the scholars in their prior research started their research from the transfer of meaning point of view rather than understanding what it means to be a celebrity for a consumer. Hence, many of the celebrities mean more than their professions, roles or performances in real life to their followers. It is being claimed that seven dimensions of celebrity meaning happen to exist such as personality, credibility, physical appearance, feelings, performance, values and cogent power which are transferrable to the brands via endorsement (Jain & Roy, 2016). Substantiating Jain (2016) study findings, Roy (2018) explains the celebrity endorsement via the meaning transfer model by using The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation technique (ZMET) with 2 rounds of metaphor elicitation conducted over 15 respondents. The study claims that the meaning generated by the celebrity or all the associations that the consumers attach to a celebrity can be defined through metaphors. In addition, Roy (2018) research findings challenged the scale developed by Ohanian (1990) source credibility model that all credibility elements or dimensions in the model refer to hold good for all celebrity endorsers; however the dimensions used to evaluate a celebrity may be different for different celebrities (Roy, 2018).

Previous models of endorsement process, the source credibility model claims that the skill sets and features of the endorser such as the legitimacy and the reliability of the endorser affects the attitude and purchase intention of the consumer (Jain, 2016). Source credibility theory originates from the research made in the field of psychology (Hovland, 1953) (McCracken, 1989). According to Hovland (1953), source credibility model is about the effect of perceived expertise and trustworthiness on how individuals process information and create attitudes towards objects. The model breaks down the endorsement process into two major components; expertness and trustworthiness of the celebrity used. These two dimensions defines how powerful is the source itself. Expertness comes with the perceived “ability” of the endorser to make more valid contentions due to his/her know how and expertise. Trustworthiness comes with the perceived “willingness” to make more contentions (McCracken, 1989). Other than these major dimensions, researchers such as Whitehead, McCroskey, Bowers and Phillips, Lemert and Mertz offers new dimensions for the measurement of the model. Regarding the scales, the attempts of aforementioned researchers uncover the perceptual structure of the sources credibility model. Safety, qualification, dynamism, authoritativeness, character, objectivity are among the new dimensions measured by the scales developed by the researchers. Overall, attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise are the major three dimensions extracted from the celebrity endorser credibility scale developed by Ohanian and can be extended to different types of products such as low or high involvement products. The three major dimensions that

Ohanian proposed based on attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise showed that these dimensions have significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions for one celebrity over another different celebrity (Ohanian, 1990) (Yang, 2018).

In addition to source credibility model, the source attractiveness model proposed by McGuire in 1985 also rests on the study of social psychology. In source attractiveness model, the celebrity set of attributes were broken down into various dimensions and among those dimensions, the attractiveness of the celebrity changes the attitude of the consumer either favorably or less favorably (Jain, 2016). The model puts forward that the message given by the endorser hinges on some chief components of the source such as familiarity, likability, and similarity of the source (McGuire, 1985).

Both models assert that sources who are expert, trustworthy and known to, liked by, and or similar to the consumer are credible or attractive and, to this extent, persuasive at the end (McCracken, 1989). However, as stated in McCracken's article, both source models have limitations. First, the appeal of the celebrity cannot be understood by the source models and make impossible to understand why a celebrity works for some products and services but not for others. Second, the source models will not discriminate between celebrities in a beneficial way. The models will fall short of explaining the process from "a symbolic or communications point of view" (McCracken, 1989). The "meanings" associated along with the celebrity is also a crucial factor in understanding the celebrity endorsement process.

In addition to the previous models; in 2008, Shimp refined the "TEARS model" (Hollensen, 2012). In this model, the features of an endorser such as trustworthiness, expertise, physical attractiveness, respect and similarity (initials forming TEARS) have a role in determining a marketing campaign's success (Hollensen, 2012). In that sense, TEARS model has a more holistic approach in explaining the celebrity endorsement. In another study, according to Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) article, celebrity endorsement mainly focuses on the distinct areas of celebrity prevalence, campaign management, financial effects, celebrity persuasion, non-evaluative meaning transfer, brand to celebrity transfer (Bergkvist, 2016).

Last but not least, as an addition to the extant literature mentioned above, in depth theoretical foundations of celebrity endorsement process was also accepted as a contribution to the literature which is summarized as below in Erdogan's 1999's article. The study summarizes the models that points out the major components of the celebrity endorsement literature (Erdogan, 1999); source attractiveness model, source credibility model, meaning transfer model along with match up hypothesis, two sided celebrity endorsement and multiple product celebrity endorsement models in review (Erdogan, 1999). Besides Erdogan's (1999) study findings, 4 mainstream models in the celebrity endorsement topic has been studied; along with the highly cited analysis of Bergkvist (2016), Schimmelpfennig (2020), Halder (2021), Ambroise (2020). The common ground aforementioned scholars agree upon is that the major models standalone may not be sufficient enough in explaining the effectiveness of the endorsement process; rather a combination of these models in different contexts might be more fruitful in terms of research findings; especially finding the right match of celebrity with the right brand/product itself. In addition to these studies, Knoll (2017) studied the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements on a meta-analytic level across a variety of measures.

Recently, with the growing popularity of social media, the research topics regarding celebrity endorsement are shifting from traditional one-way endorsement processes to more interactive ones enabling two-way communication in between the followers and the celebrities. Since brands discover social media is a powerful tool to reach out the consumers all over the world, some figures such as social media influencers seem to have a tremendous influence over followers; even in some cases more than the celebrities with their purchase decisions. As a result, the endorsement process in online channels becomes an interesting topic for many of the researchers (shaneberker.com, 2022) (Veirman, 2017) (Gräve, 2017) (Gräve, 2022) (Kapitan, 2016) (Zeren, 2020) (Schouten, 2020).

2.2 Celebrity Endorsement in a Cultural Context; Meaning Transfer Model

According to McCracken, transfer of the meaning from the celebrity to the product in use becomes the focal point of the meaning transfer model. The necessity of the model comes from the transfer process in the endorsement. McCracken claims marketing via endorsement is a powerful tool in creating a pool of celebrities along with various characteristics and these characteristics are being transferred to a brand from the celebrity. These characteristics are reflected onto the consumer once they purchase or consume that particular brand. In other words, the meaning or significance transfers from the endorsed celebrity to the brand; then from the brand to the consumer. In larger context, this process can be adhered to a whole society or culture. Model states that celebrities play a significant role in reflecting the current culture in a society throughout marketing initiatives such as celebrity endorsement (McCracken, 1989).

Existing models such as source credibility and attractiveness models neglect to cover major and crucial phases in the endorsement process; where they do not address the endorsement process from a cultural context. The endorsement process is driven through the symbols or metaphors that represent the celebrity endorser. From meaning transfer perspective, these assets and the symbolic properties owned by the celebrity move from the cultural aspects of the society to the endorser than to the branded product and finally reflected onto the consumer. The brand communities or with a larger scheme consumer markets are also being affected by this meaning transfer pointing disputed topics regarding society (McCracken, 1989). According to this model, the concept meaning is already extant in the current marketplace where McCracken defined as “culturally constituted world” (McCracken, 1988). Besides, in the transfer of meaning from the brand to the consumer, consumer is being affected by the current environment where McCracken defines as the “physical and social world” along with the categories and principles of the prevalent culture. From a marketing standpoint, advertising becomes a major channel throughout this meaning transfer. According to McCracken; a pool of celebrities is being constituted with different characteristics and properties based on demographic variables or some other psychographic variables such as lifestyle, personality, attitude or even the degree of his or her popularity. Then, the celebrity who matches best with the brand or products intended message is being selected out of this pool. The cultural meaning that the celebrity represents for becomes important throughout this whole endorsement process. Therefore, the practice of celebrity endorsement is highly correlated to the cultural context in which the celebrities belong to and the selection process is correlated with the cultural meaning that the brand or product stands for (McCracken, 1989).

To some extent, meaning transfer model is beneficial in the sense that it prevents the scholars and practitioners from seeing that celebrities are “individualized and complex bundles of cultural meaning”. In addition, the endorsement process consists in the transfer of the meaning from the celebrity to the product, and from the product to the end consumer. As it is stated in the article, celebrity endorsement process is cultural in nature, and that the study of the celebrity and the whole endorsement process is being reviewed by a cultural perspective throughout this model (McCracken, 1989).

3. Global Marketing and Celebrity Endorsement Perspectives

Celebrity endorsement play a compelling role while marketing to overseas markets. While entering foreign markets, celebrity endorsement becomes a powerful strategy to beat the global marketing related barriers. Celebrities that are trustworthy, credible, attractive and popular in the global markets help brands or major companies to avoid the problems associated with the internationalization. Hofstede outlines the major issues such as time zone differences, language barriers, the context of relationships in the society, power or authority perceptions, economic or social risks in a country, masculinity or femininity perception in the society along with some other issues that can affect the internationalization of a company (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) (Hofstede, 2011) (Kaikati, 1987).

According to McCracken (1989), the success of the celebrity endorsement depends on the celebrity chosen that makes sense to the target audience and requires to be compatible with the consumer values and norms within the culture of the targeted market. In addition to McCracken, some scholars argue that celebrities with global popularity can help companies to cope with the cultural obstacles (Kaikati, 1987); some others assert that companies have to understand what celebrity endorsers mean to consumers across different cultures (Paek, 2003). As it is stated in the article (Chao et al., 2005) using a foreign figure can act as an inhibitor or as a liability for the brand in other local markets. Regarding consumer product and service evaluations, “a foreign celebrity or a foreign brand name can enhance or diminish consumer attitude, product quality perception and purchase intention in another country” (Chao et al., 2005).

Regarding the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in global markets, the cultural values of the society determines the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers that are advertising the brands or products (Winterich et al, 2018). Winterich claims that whether the celebrity endorsement varies across countries as well as effectiveness of the endorsement also similarly vary across cultures is being answered. Marketing communication strategies and intended messages required to be adapted to the prevalent culture of the country to be entered. For example, as stated in the Winterich (2018) article, emerging markets are generally high in power distance dimension are more receptive and react more favorably to the globally known celebrities as evidenced from the advertisement performance evaluations. One of the reasons behind this can be explained as the consumers in high power distance societies tend to accept celebrities with greater expertise and the consumers with low power distance do not tend to attribute greater expertise to celebrity endorsers compared to non-celebrity spokespeople (Winterich et al., 2018).

4. Celebrity Endorsement Process in Global Markets: Turkish Airlines Case

Turkish Airlines (TA), a global brand established in 1933 in Turkey, is one of the most well-known brands that goes beyond the borders of Turkey, today with a fleet of 329 aircraft flying to over 326 destinations in 127 countries carrying more than 74 million passengers as of 2021 (thy.com & staralliance.com). 8.6 million by the end of 2017. Turkish Airlines is a full service carrier operating both in domestic and international markets; the pioneering brand in the Turkish aviation industry. Turkish Airlines positions itself as a full service carrier with excellent and unique customer experience with top-notch in-flight service which makes it different from the rest of the players in the aviation industry; apart from other full service carriers and low cost airlines.

Its dominant presence and experience in the domestic market becomes a solid asset for the company while expanding into overseas routes with various transfer hubs in different cities all over the world. Hence, while increasing its fleet and route numbers along with its worldwide operations, the company also invests in branding and marketing as well. While going global, the company logo has been also changed several times with a modern, minimalist look and corporate logo took its current form by the end of 2018 (1000logos.net, 2021). Its brand slogan, as a reflection of its global initiatives after reaching 200 destinations, changed from “globally yours” to “widen your world” (traveldaily.com, 2021).

In order to increase its public awareness and brand popularity and strengthen its brand image in global markets, the company partners with various celebrity endorsers. In that sense, Turkish Airlines becomes a well-known and proven example of celebrity endorsement strategies congruent with global strategies of the company that work well while targeting new global markets.

By 2010, Turkish Airlines worked with the two top-notch football clubs of F.C. Barcelona (visual 1) and became F.C. Barcelona’s official carrier in international flights (fcbarcelona.com, 2021). In addition, another sponsorship contract was signed between Turkish Airlines and Manchester United (visual 2); replacing AirAsia and becoming the official carrier of the million-dollar soccer club (bbc.com, 2021). As a result of these operational investments and branding efforts, total number of its passengers increased by 16% to 29,1 million, along with the rise of international passenger market share by 1,25% in the following year. Not surprisingly, the increase in passenger numbers happened at the same time where the sponsorship contracts with two premium football clubs have been signed (Mamuti, 2013) (Atas & Morris, 2015).

Visual 1: Turkish Airlines sponsorship with FCBarcelona



Visual 2: Turkish Airlines sponsorship with Manchester United

As top management, realizing the value of being global player in the highly competitive and fierce arena of aviation industry, Turkish Airlines keep endorsing the brand with various celebrity endorsements and sponsorship events in their global communication in the following years. As it is stated by the Mr. Sirin (2013), the brand communications manager of Turkish Airlines; “The pathway of being famous requires seeming together with a famous”. This statement in brief clarifies Turkish Airline’s view over the endorsement of celebrities and the overall strategy of the brand in their international expansion policy. The company positions itself as a global carrier working with globally accepted names in the minds of the consumers which is also compatible with the other marketing mix elements. According to Sirin (2013), the messages along with these bold campaigns delivers different sub messages and differ in ‘meaning’ in different overseas markets as summarized below:

- ✚ “In Japan; Modest messages”
- ✚ “In England; Proved messages”
- ✚ “In America; Assertive messages”
- ✚ “In Arab Emirates; Privileged messages” (Atas & Morris, 2015).

Further, Mr. Sirin (2013) stated that “it is difficult to deliver the same intended meaning through your message(s) within different cultural context, nevertheless our marketing research showed that this can be achieved if an emphasizing put on ‘positive’ message delivery. If you could manage to reach them with their own languages, you would gain their respect as a stranger who has made an effort to understand their culture and values”.

These statements coming from the top management of Turkish Airlines proves that Turkish Airlines is executing a glocal (thinking global acting local) internationalization process while respecting the local cultures using globally accepted figures all over the world. These global figures are a reflection of the global networks of the airline. In 2016, Turkish Airlines took off the deal with Warner Bros Pictures sponsoring the movie “Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice” (visual 3) adding Gotham City and Metropolis to their flight network fictionally (hurriyetdailynews.com, 2016).

Visual 3: Turkish Airlines sponsorship of Batman vs. Superman Movie

Among the celebrities Turkish Airlines endorsed can be listed as, Kobe Bryant and Lionel Messi in 2012 (visual 4), Kevin Costner in 2009 (visual 5), Morgan Freeman in 2016 (visual 5), Dr. Mehmet Oz (visual 5) in 2018 (skift.com, 2013) Turkish Airlines became the first Turkish brand who aired an advertorial in the event of SuperBowl in 2019; a 6-minute short film named "The Journey" (visual 6) directed by the famous director Ridley Scott (hurriyet.com, 2019).

Visual 4: Lionel Messi and Kobe Bryant in Turkish Airlines Ad

As it is evident from the successful combination of celebrity endorsers, who are widely known, popular, credible and accepted by many of the consumers in different regions of the world, Turkish Airlines increased its brand popularity, awareness and strengthen its brand image all over the world. During years 2010-2011, regarding Euro league, Turkish Airlines' logo has been displayed 4,588 times which contributes to its brand awareness and popularity (Atas, 2015). "Kobe vs. Messi: The Selfie Shootout" that took place in 2013 viewed 137.2 million times since its debut, awarded the Most Viral Celebrity Spot in Advertising Age's 2014 Viral Video Awards (businesswire.com, 2014). According the Brand Finance 2022 report, Turkish Airlines ranked the most valuable brand of Turkey with a brand value of 1.60 billion US Dollars, for the 5th time in a row (hurriyetdailynews.com, 2022).

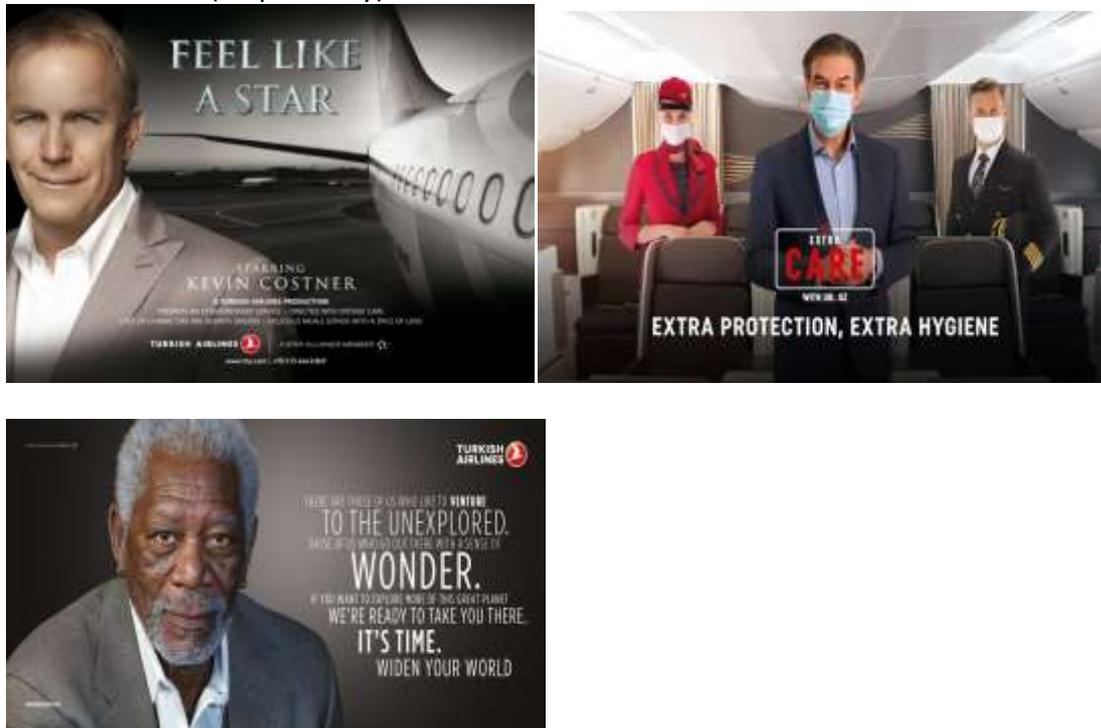
Coherent with the meaning transfer model, the symbolic meanings reflected by the celebrities endorsed by Turkish Airlines can be asserted as;

- ✚ Global celebrities known by millions of consumers in different regions of the world,

- ✚ High popularity and awareness,
- ✚ Highly credible and trustworthy,
- ✚ Highly admired (especially soccer and basketball players),
- ✚ Experienced in their specific area of interest.

All in all, from the common characteristics of the celebrities mentioned above, these are also the sub meanings that has been transferred from the celebrity to the product then to the consumers. Foremost, the most important message that intended to be given by Turkish Airlines is the company has been becoming a global player in the aviation industry with the widest network of flight routes. As a result of their globalization strategy, they are partnering with the global figures who are also the best in their arena. In this context, it is also being supported by the statements given by the top management of Turkish Airlines for several times.

Visual 5: Kevin Costner, Morgan Freeman and Dr. Mehmet Oz as celebrity endorsers of Turkish Airlines (respectively).



Visual 6: A short film poster of Turkish Airlines aired in SuperBowl



5. Future Research Implications, Limitations and Conclusion

Obviously, Turkish Airlines paid the price and gained the rewards of investing heavily in branding and marketing. Flying to the largest range of routes, the company is flying passengers to 127 countries, 326 cities and 331 airports. In 2010, just before partnering with the celebrity endorsers or becoming the official carrier of two premium soccer clubs such as FC Barcelona and Manchester United, the number of passengers carried was around 29 million. In almost 10 years, this number with a substantial increase hit the 74.2 million number. In 2015, Turkish Airlines selected several times the best of the best in different categories such as the best airline in Europe, the best business class lounge dining, the best business class catering, the best catering in economy class, etc. (turkishairlines.com, 2021). Similarly, also in domestic market, Turkish Airlines selected the most valuable brand of Turkey in a research conducted by Brand Finance in 2022 with a brand value of almost 2 billion US Dollars (aa.com, 2020) (hurriyetdailynews.com, 2022).

Regarding the celebrity endorsement literature, within the context of meaning transfer model, all the celebrities endorsed by Turkish Airlines seem to fit with the brand values of Turkish Airlines. Turkish Airlines aims to be the preferred aviation brand especially in long haul flights targeting North American and Canadian customers promising the top notch quality onboard experience in both economy and business class. So, it can be asserted that the celebrities endorsed and the popular sponsorship events are not by coincidence. For global purposes, the common symbolic meaning of these aforementioned celebrities is that they are all global, trustable, popular, visible, and attractive in their specific field of expertise. So, it is been evident that after each debut of the celebrity in an advertorial or sponsorship, audiences are becoming more surprised with the fact that an aviation company coming from Istanbul hub-Turkey endorses multi-million dollar worth celebrities to increase its visibility. The more its visibility increases, the more consumers get surprised about the company facts. For example, Turkish Airlines flies to far more international destinations than any other carrier on earth, a fact getting known by consumers in North America after Dr. Oz seen in SuperBowl (forbes.com, 2018), a desirable result for the Turkish Airlines management that aims to have a solid presence in the North American market.

One of the limitations of this case study article might be the evaluation of the Turkish Airlines case or many upcoming cases, not only within the meaning transfer model but also with the major mainstream models; also being the common point of Bergkvist (2016), Schimmelpfennig (2020), Halder (2021), Ambroise (2020) studies. All in all, these studies claim that the combination of these models might have more explanatory power over the endorsement process; what is the meaning of the celebrity to the consumers (not only in global overseas markets but also in domestic markets), how effective is the celebrity endorsed and what is the ROI regarding the endorsement. So far, other than the potential increase in sales figures, brand value and social media numbers, one cannot claim that celebrity endorsements effectiveness in detailed numbers since many key performance indicators are not shared with the public even many of the aviation company's shares are being traded in stock exchange markets.

For future studies, especially combining the celebrity endorsement topic with the global marketing strategies, one research topic might be the reverse effect of using global celebrities by the companies expanding into global markets. Such a reverse effect could be

that of Turkish Airlines can create consumer alienation and a change in the attitude of consumers in their domestic market while expanding into overseas markets. The research conducted by Zuhail Cilingir in the province of Istanbul using Cetscale developed by Shimp and Sharma, Turkish consumers found to be relatively (situational) ethnocentric (Cilingir, 2014) which might be supporting this assumption. So, in an ethnocentric consumer market like Turkey, it is evident that Turkish consumers are proud of Turkish Airlines and as an end result, the company in 2020 selected the most valuable brand of Turkey. Hence, still for further areas of research in celebrity endorsement, the extant literature can be getting richer with multiple research topics in question. Based on this research finding, a further research question will center around regarding the attitude and feelings of Turkish consumers about Turkish Airlines; a national carrier going global with several global celebrity endorsers; "Should the Turkish consumer may be proud of that brand or may feel alienated toward that brand?".

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