

# 1

## Celebrity's impact on the media



As we shall see, celebrity impacts on so many aspects of everyday life it's hardly surprising that it has the same sort of effect on the media. Hollywood and the movie industry is based entirely on the creation of stars and the leading icons of the silver screen have had a very significant influence on generations of cinemagoers. Hollywood is a market in celebrities that represents the pinnacle of a global phenomenon. In an inexorable process the public votes with its wallet for actors and actresses whom they favour and as they climb over each other in the popularity stakes some of them eventually arrive as contemporary gods at the top of the fame mountain.

Public fascination with celebrities has a long history, however the increased opportunities to glimpse into their private lives via intrusive media, means that people can get ever closer to their idols and spend considerable sums of money doing so. If celebrity were not so important to millions of people in human society then it would be absolutely impossible for stars to enlist the legions of fans who follow them and thus to command the fees they do. No doubt the film studios, the talent scouts, the agents and the journalists who make, break and feed off celebrities have a part to play, but in the end there is a deep need in human society to generate these iconic figures, worship them and then very often pull them back down to earth.

Market research can help establish the value of celebrities. 'Q Scores' have been established in the USA for over 40 years and these are a product of a Long Island USA research company called Marketing Evaluations. Q Scores are drawn from their consumer panel measuring the familiarity and appeal of performers, characters, sports and sports personalities, broadcast and cable programmes, as well as company and brand names. The data

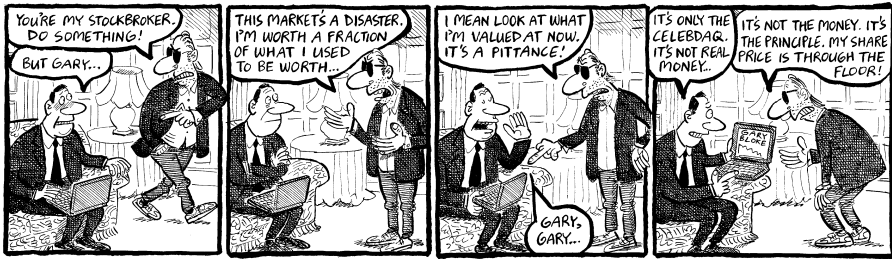


Figure 1 Celeb 'Celebdaq'.

Source: Private Eye/Ligger.

© Pressdram Limited 2002. Reproduced by permission.

analysis summarizes the various perceptions and feelings that consumers have, into a single, 'likeability' measurement. Tom Hanks has topped their chart as the most likeable actor since 1995 and his Q Score has consistently been at least double the score for the average actor.

There are also many lists that attempt to establish the monetary value of movie stars, and there's even the 'Celebdaq' online index that enables players to buy and sell shares in stars on a virtual stock exchange (Figure 1).

But perhaps the clearest indication is what they get paid per picture nowadays. No doubt each of these celebrities also has accumulated wealth, but in a sense that isn't a measure of their current market value derived from their popularity today.

These rankings are a snapshot in time and represent the hierarchy of fame that to a large degree orientates a significant section of global society, who take their social, behavioural and presentational lead from these Hollywood stars. These movie celebrities represent the pinnacle of the social Darwinist peak, but they are being challenged increasingly by the stars that television and other media generate.

*Forbes Magazine* ranks celebrities in terms of their earnings over the past 12 months and while movie people do still make up nine places in the list, the rest are taken by stars from the worlds of TV, music and sport. Top of the *Forbes Global Celebrity 100* is Jennifer Aniston, the 'Friends' star who reportedly earned £21 million in 2002, including £600,000 per episode of the hit comedy show. Part of Aniston's appeal in her role as 'Rachel' in 'Friends', which has made her a megastar, is her distinctive hairstyle and no doubt this is why L'Oréal has struck a sponsorship deal with her to endorse their hair products. It seems that many major advertisers want to get close to the 'Friends' effect and it's forecast that the demand for airtime in the final episode scheduled for May 2004 will force the price up to \$2 million per 30-second spot or roughly £66,000 a second!

**Forbes Global Celebrity 100**

- 1 Jennifer Aniston
- 2 Eminem and Dr Dre
- 3 Tiger Woods
- 4 Steven Spielberg
- 5 Jennifer Lopez
- 6 Sir Paul McCartney
- 7 Ben Affleck
- 8 Oprah Winfrey
- 9 Tom Hanks
- 10 The Rolling Stones
- 11 Will Smith
- 12 The Osbournes
- 13 Michael Jordan
- 14 Mike Myers
- 15 JK Rowling
- 16 Nicole Kidman
- 17 George Lucas
- 18 Eddie Murphy
- 19 Michael Schumacher
- 20 Jim Carrey

*Source: Forbes Magazine.*

Reprinted by permission of *Forbes Magazine* © 2003 Forbes inc.

The *Hollywood Reporter* at the end of 2002 also gave top ten rankings for male and female stars, with, perhaps unsurprisingly, Tom Hanks and Tom Cruise as equal first. The top ten female rankings see the likes of Sandra Bullock overtaking long-time actresses Meg Ryan and Jodie Foster but it is Julia Roberts who takes the top spot.

Over the last decade we have moved into a new era in which the voracious appetite of the consuming public for all things celebrity has generated entire segments of the magazine market, transformed the contents of the broadsheet newspapers and given birth to a whole new genre of TV programme. Soap operas have always been generators of huge numbers of celebrities on both sides of the Atlantic, in Europe and indeed around the world. The day-to-day sagas that reflect, albeit in a slightly heightened fashion, everyday life, have been hugely successful. In the UK 'Coronation Street', whose first episode appeared in December 1960, is still one of the most watched programmes in the country and younger pretender 'EastEnders' born in 1985, commands an

audience just as big and has recently been extended to four new episodes per week, plus a fifth weekend 'omnibus' edition.

The phenomenon of reality TV, which makes celebrities out of ordinary people and also gives faded celebrities the opportunity to redeem themselves, is a global one. John de Mol one of the former owners of Endemol and creator of the 'Big Brother' format has already amassed a fortune estimated at \$1 billion. 'Big Brother' has now become a programme seen in 30 countries around the world and has spawned a host of imitators. It's also a show which has created some of the highest ever levels of audience participation through its voting dimension and on average 2 million people vote for the expulsion of a house member using either an SMS text message, email, or a telephone call. 'Big Brother' has also created big business for other media. Tabloid newspapers such as the *Sun*, which have picked up strongly on the programme and championed particular inhabitants of the house, have seen very significant sales impacts. Jade Goody has also done extremely well for *Heat* magazine. Their cover featuring a Jade makeover in August 2002 was their best selling of all time, achieving sales of 655,000 compared to the previous year's average of 554,000. Because of the relentless exposure that participants in the Big Brother house receive, the audience feels they get to know them with a degree of intimacy which may well exceed that which they share with their own partners and friends and thus they have a very keen desire to follow their fortunes, their highs and their lows. In addition, because these instant celebrities are in fact 'someone just like me' they can live out social scenarios, ways of being and ways of talking, vicariously through another person and without risk. Hence the appeal of the makeover story about Jade Goody (Figure 2).

'Pop Idol' in the UK is another 'everyday celebrity' show that has created huge audiences and competitors such as 'Pop Stars' and 'Fame Academy'. In the USA the final of 'American Idol' generated record ratings of 23 million viewers for Fox, the US broadcaster, which was their biggest audience for a non-sports programme in over ten years. Six months later even that record was trounced by the 40 million viewers who tuned into the final of Fox TV's reality show 'Joe Millionaire' to see Evan Marriott, a construction worker pretending to be the heir to a fortune, pick the winner from 20 women who had travelled to a French chateau to win his heart. In the context of the Academy Awards ceremony on ABC the previous year achieving a viewership of 41.8 million, this is an astonishing achievement and confirmation of the degree to which 'everyday celebrity' has pervaded society.

The impact of celebrity can also be seen in one-off TV documentaries as well as in programme series and in a way these individual shows, which



Figure 2 Cover of Heat magazine.

Source: Heat magazine.

Reproduced by permission of EMAP PLC.

have to build an audience for one night only, demonstrate the power and fascination of famous people for the public even more strongly. In November 1995 Martin Bashir's notorious confessional interview with Diana, Princess of Wales was watched by more than 21 million viewers. Eight years later on Monday 3 February 2003 Bashir's extraordinary documentary about Michael Jackson gripped 14 million UK viewers, with 1.7 million viewers recording the programme to watch it later on. This represents an audience share of

54% and means that the Jackson documentary is likely to be among the most watched programmes of that year. The impact was also huge in the USA with 27 million people watching the documentary on ABC.

The celebrity phenomenon has largely been created by the movies and television, but there is no doubt that other media have played a significant part. Indeed a whole new sector has grown up that promotes and feeds off celebrity culture. Magazines such as *Hello!*, *OK!*, *Heat* and *Now!* sell an enormous number of copies per issue and it's estimated that in 2002 the total sale of celebrity-related magazines approached 100 million in the UK, with sales of the four main celebrity magazines alone selling over 2.5 million per week by the beginning of 2003. Further, even the most highbrow of broadsheet newspapers such as *The Times* or the *Daily Telegraph* are increasingly celebrity driven and it's hard to find an issue that does not feature a 'personality' on its front cover. Not such a long time ago these newspapers would have primarily dealt in newsmakers from the worlds of politics, business or finance. Nowadays they are as likely to feature Sven-Goran Eriksson as Ericsson in their main news item.

All media have become suffused with celebrity. The newsreaders on TV, the magazine editors and the lead journalists have become celebrities too. TV commercials or print advertisements that feature stars and appear in this media environment fit in naturally with it, so it's hardly surprising that up to 20% of all advertising employs celebrities. All the evidence suggests that these campaigns are very effective in promoting the corporate, product and service brands with which they are aligned.