

You Are the Next Entrepreneurial Idol: Behavioral Strategy of Celebrity Construction

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Jenifer Lopez, Rihanna, and Michael Jordan run their own businesses by leveraging their popularity which is based on the positive attention from the public. Of course, like Kanye West, American rapper who is criticized for hate speech, massive attention sometimes act as a double edged sword. However, there is limited attention on the questions how celebrities are constructed, what's the behavioural strategy for "unknowns" to gain positive evaluation.

It is important to understand the transformation of entrepreneurial resource mobilization in online platforms. Social media has enabled individuals to leverage their online presence and turn it into an asset. Influencers, for example, can monetize their followers' engagement through various means, while YouTube content creators utilize their videos to attract a large audience and generate revenue from advertisements. Furthermore, even established companies now collaborate with popular social media influencers and their team as alliances to expand their reach and gain greater exposure. Therefore, understanding this new breed of entrepreneurs and how they mobilize their resources becomes crucial in the evolving landscape of entrepreneurship.

Creating impactful and attention-grabbing moments on social media has become increasingly important. However, existing research has only touched upon certain aspects of how these moments are crafted through the interaction between entrepreneurs and their audiences. While studies on celebrities have shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of such interactions, as well as the influence of media in shaping narratives, a comprehensive understanding of this process is still limited. Celebrity refers to the power of drawing a significant level of positive emotional response from audiences and stakeholders. With that in mind, how do entrepreneurs effectively shape positive emotional responses? Which behavioral strategies can prove advantageous for newcomers in the market?

Certain research in the field has investigated how new entrants in the market navigate the challenges of established both their credibility and uniqueness. This often involves a decision-making process where entrepreneurs contemplate whether to conform to existing market categories in order to gain positive attention from audiences or to differentiate themselves through their behavior and market position to gain a competitive edge. However, on the other hand, previous studies indicate that straying too far from established categorical norms and deviating from category archetype is less likely to result in successful audience attention and recognition.

Our study aimed to examine the process of celebrity construction by analyzing data from American Idol, covering 16 years from season 1 to season 15, including 411 contestants and 2,147 performances. We sought to identify the behaviors that shape positive attention from audiences, which, in turn, determine the contestants' survival and degree of celebrity. Based on our findings, we present two key practices for constructing celebrity that can enhance positive attention for your business.

1. **Know Your Orientation.** It is crucial to identify your reference point for evaluation. Are you a college dropout from an Ivy League university or a self-made entrepreneur? Is your business technology-based or centered around unique business plans? These factors define your reference point for evaluators. If you are an Ivy League dropout, your evaluator expects you to be knowledgeable and passionate about your business beyond your academic degree. This means you need to have some experience to follow educational norms, but you may have a passion for pursuing your unrealized dreams. If you do not have a strong educational background, you need to show your previous trial and error to demonstrate your perseverance to evaluators. The reason is that your background sets the reference point for your evaluators for your future behaviors. In our dataset from American Idol, the first chosen musical genre became the reference point for

the contestants' subsequent performances. For instance, in season five, Chris Daughtry chose "Wanted Dead or Alive" by Bon Jovi and continued to choose rock-related songs throughout the show. This set the audiences' expectation that he would perform within the rock genre rather than R&B or hip-hop. Therefore, claiming a specific category or orientation can establish the reference point for evaluators for future evaluations.

2. **First, Conform, then Differentiate.** Some influencers and YouTubers may take risks by showcasing different behaviors to avoid being repetitive and stale in the eyes of their audiences. However, conforming to previous performances before differentiating can be a better approach. According to celebrity literature, non-conforming behavior can attract massive media and public attention as it is seen as a dramatic and attention-gathering source. In the case of American Idol, our data shows that conforming to the original genre claims is more likely to lead to an increase in the degree of celebrity during the show. However, this changes in later stages of the show when contestants have more visibility, and standing out from the self-claimed categories and competitors is necessary. Therefore, behaviors need to be varied based on the level of presence on a particular stage and should be different from the previous performances and other contestants. Research on category shows that conforming to norms or categories is usually rewarded, while deviations are considered violations of the audience's expectations and may lead to negative feedback.
3. **Media presence does not necessarily beneficial.** Influencers and founders favor exposing their model to the massive public via conventional media because it feels like another official endorsement and allows to invite more followers. However, our research show that media exposure has positive effect at the early stage when it comes to conforming behavior, and there is no positive effect at the later stages which is the business is matured at some point.

In the realm of social media, entrepreneurs encounter numerous challenges when it comes to capturing the attention of audiences. While certain tactics may yield short-term attention, the sustainability of acquiring genuine followers and subscribers remains uncertain. The entrepreneurial journey itself is demanding, and it can be tempting to resort to irritating promotions in order to achieve quick success. However, it is important to recognize that entrepreneurship is akin to a marathon—a long term endeavor. Audiences are observant and can assess an entrepreneur's behavior in real time. Aligning with socially constructed norms and archetypes can serve as valuable assets to legitimize your business, as meeting audience expectations enhances credibility and fosters positive engagement.

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