

**Marina Đukić\***

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Academy of Arts and Culture  
Department of Culture, Media and Management

**Iva Buljubašić\*\***

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Academy of Arts and Culture  
Department of Culture, Media and Management

**Dora Brzović\*\*\***

Student of University graduate study programme "Media and Public Relations"  
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Academy of Arts and Culture  
Department of Culture, Media and Management

**FROM FAME TO FIT: HOW SOCIAL ORIGINS OF CELEBRITY SHAPE AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF BRAND CONGRUENCE**

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This study explores how the social origins of celebrity fame shape audience perceptions of brand - celebrity congruence, addressing the broader question of how fame translates "from fame to fit" in mediated endorsement contexts. It investigates whether audiences differentiate between inherited, achieved, or media-constructed fame and how these distinctions affect perceptions of credibility and symbolic alignment with brands. A quantitative survey was conducted among 902 participants in Croatia, combining recognition tasks, open-ended associations, and items assessing perceived endorsement suitability. Data analysis employed frequency distributions and chi-square tests to examine links between fame perception and evaluations of brand fit.

Findings show that while overall recognition of brands and celebrities is high, spontaneous associations between them remain weak. Respondents tend to anchor brand - celebrity fit in domain relevance, with celebrities identified as having achieved fame generally seen as more credible endorsers. However, celebrities with complex or media - driven visibility were also evaluated positively when their personas aligned with brand values, particularly through authenticity or narrative coherence.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in empirically operationalising the perceived origin of fame as a measurable factor in endorsement evaluation - bridging conceptual celebrity typologies with audience-based measures of brand fit. This communication-oriented approach extends existing models of congruence and credibility by demonstrating that legitimacy of fame origin interacts with domain relevance and narrative framing in shaping endorsement effectiveness.

Limitations include cultural specificity and the focus on a limited set of celebrities. Future studies should adopt cross - cultural and qualitative approaches to capture deeper audience reasoning.

**Keywords:** celebrity capital, brand - celebrity congruence, fame origin perception, media representation.

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\* Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Julija Knifer Street 1, 31 000 Osijek, Croatia; e -mail: marina.djukic@aukos.hr

\*\* Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Julija Knifer Street 1, 31 000 Osijek, Croatia; e -mail: iva.buljubasic@aukos.hr

\*\*\* Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Julija Knifer Street 1, 31 000 Osijek, Croatia

## 1. Introduction

Celebrity endorsement operates at the intersection of market positioning and communicative influence, where public figures function as semiotic intermediaries between brands and audiences (McCracken, 1989). As media platforms evolve and new forms of visibility emerge, the symbolic function of celebrities - as both signifiers of meaning and agents of influence - has gained increased relevance in consumer culture. From a marketing perspective, celebrity endorsements are understood to enhance brand visibility, emotional appeal, and trust (Erdogan, 1999). From the standpoint of communication sciences, however, celebrities are not fixed identities but mediated constructs - texts circulated, framed, and reinterpreted through discourse (Turner, 2014; Marshall, 2006).

These dual perspectives converge in the concept of brand-celebrity congruence, which captures how well a celebrity's public persona aligns with a brand's identity (Misra & Beatty, 1990). The perception of such congruence can be shaped by multiple factors, including the celebrity's credibility, perceived expertise, authenticity, and - crucially - their social origin of fame. Building on Rojek's (2001) typology of celebrity status (ascribed, achieved, attributed, and celestoid), this study investigates how audiences evaluate endorsement suitability by interpreting the source of a celebrity's fame. In other words, it examines how fame translates "from fame to fit" within endorsement contexts.

While prior research has examined the effects of congruence, credibility, and attractiveness on endorsement effectiveness, there is a notable lack of empirical studies addressing whether audiences consciously recognize and classify a celebrity's fame origin, and how this perception influences their evaluation of endorsement fit. By integrating Rojek's typology with the communicative and symbolic dimensions of brand - celebrity congruence, this study introduces a novel analytical perspective that connects audience perceptions of fame legitimacy with endorsement credibility.

The scientific contribution of this paper lies in extending existing models of endorsement effectiveness by operationalising the perceived origin of fame as a distinct explanatory factor. In doing so, it bridges marketing and communication perspectives and situates celebrity - brand evaluation within a broader framework of mediated representation, symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and celebrity capital (Driessens, 2013). This approach not only enriches the theoretical understanding of endorsement processes but also provides a foundation for future cross-cultural and media-specific studies on celebrity - brand alignment in the digital era.

## 2. Literature Review

The effectiveness of celebrity endorsement extends beyond mere visibility, relying instead on the symbolic and communicative roles celebrities play within branding discourse. Scholars from both marketing and communication fields emphasize that

celebrities shape consumer perceptions through media - constructed narratives, identities, and social capital (Turner, 2014; Marshall, 2006). Rather than being innate, these meanings emerge through media exposure, public discourse, and audience engagement.

Turner (2014) defines celebrity as a commodified outcome of media representation, sustained through cultural and promotional mechanisms. Rojek (2015) similarly views celebrity status as a product of media-attributed qualities, while Giles (2000) highlights the media's role in constructing public recognition. Marshall (2006) adds that celebrity is shaped by public investment, making fame a co-produced phenomenon involving media, audiences, and cultural intermediaries (Turner, 2014; Giles, 2000; Rojek, 2001; Driessens, 2013; Stewart & Giles, 2019; Deller & Murphy, 2020). The rise of digital platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has intensified these dynamics, enabling individuals to convert mediated visibility into what Driessens (2013) terms "celebrity capital" - a symbolic currency that holds commercial value across domains, particularly endorsements (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019; Erdogan, 1999). As McCracken (1989) argues, celebrities serve as symbolic carriers who transfer culturally embedded meanings to brands, turning endorsement into a communicative practice. Rojek (2015) expands on this by introducing the "humanizing effect" of celebrity, where endorsed products reflect the celebrity's persona and cultural value, extending their symbolic identity into the consumer space.

Given their symbolic role as cultural signifiers, celebrities contribute significantly to branding discourse, with brand - celebrity congruence emerging as one of key factors in endorsement effectiveness. Misra & Beatty (1990) define congruence as the alignment between a spokesperson's traits and the brand's attributes - essentially, the perceived fit between a celebrity's image and a brand's identity. Empirical findings on congruence yield mixed results. While high congruence often enhances advertising impact and message credibility (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Min, Chang, Jai & Ziegler, 2019; Mishra, Roy & Bailey, 2015; Calvo - Porral & Lévy - Mangin, 2024), some studies suggest that moderate incongruence may also positively affect consumer responses (Harmon - Kizer, 2017). The effect of congruence can be influenced by factors such as publicity valence and brand commitment, particularly when negative information about the endorser is present (Um & Kim, 2016).

Recent empirical research has further explored the nuanced mechanisms underlying brand-celebrity congruence. For instance, congruence across media types enhances advertising effectiveness (e.g., traditional celebrity ads perform better on TV, but converge with influencer effectiveness on social media) (Grunwald, Kara, Kapukaya & Zeren, 2025). Moderators such as product - endorser fit, popularity, self - congruity, and similarity have been shown to alter consumer responses between SMIs and traditional celebrities (Chen, Lin, Yeh, Chou & Yeh, 2025). Trustworthiness continues to emerge as a key mediator

between congruence and purchase intentions (Hossain et al., 2025). Moreover, influencer endorsements on social media significantly influence buying behavior through credibility and authenticity (Mohan, 2025; Khatimah & Sobarsyah, 2024; Agnihotri, 2025; Wang & Weng, 2024, Chavda & Chauhan, 2024; Jha, Rana, Upadhyay & Singh 2025; Ekasari, Diposumarto & Muharam, 2024). In addition, several studies show that celebrity attractiveness impacts purchase intention (Musthofa, Amin & Riyoko, 2025; Chou, Chen & Shen, 2024; Wang, 2024).

Notably, perceived trust plays a critical role in shaping endorsement effectiveness (Calvo-Porràl & Lévy - Mangin, 2024). Liang, Meng - Hsiang & Tung - Hsiang (2022) confirm that congruence with both product and follower context strengthens purchase motivation through enhanced credibility, while Jun, Han, Zhou & Eisingerich (2023) demonstrate that cultural proximity between the celebrity and audience heightens perceived congruence. Kutlu (2022) provides evidence from the apparel sector, showing that congruence in fashion endorsements significantly reinforces brand - celebrity associations. Similarly, Tseng & Wang (2023) highlight that congruence mediates the link between influencer involvement and purchase intention in online communities. Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez - Sánchez (2020) add that authenticity and self-disclosure in social media contexts directly enhance perceived credibility, even for celebrities with media-constructed fame. Min et al. (2019) further emphasize the role of visual coherence and social media identity in enhancing perceived fit, especially in fashion and beauty industries. Together, these findings suggest that congruence operates through a combination of cognitive (domain relevance, expertise), affective (authenticity, trustworthiness), and contextual (cultural proximity, follower base) mechanisms. From a communication standpoint, congruence can also be understood as a rhetorical strategy that reduces cognitive dissonance and improves message clarity (Till & Busler, 2000), thereby positively shaping brand attitudes. Underlying this fit is the source credibility model, defined by expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990). These dimensions - along with attractiveness (Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011) - influence audience perceptions of the endorser. Importantly, expertise, particularly when aligned with the product domain, often outweighs attractiveness in determining endorsement credibility (Till & Busler, 2000).

Considering the social origin of fame, as outlined by Rojek (2001), adds further layers to the concept of brand-celebrity congruence. Rojek's typology - comprising ascribed, achieved, attributed, and celetoid fame - provides a sociological framework for understanding how fame is both constructed and interpreted. Each fame type carries assumptions about legitimacy, merit, and cultural capital, which shape audience perceptions of endorsement suitability. Rojek (2001) distinguishes between ascribed fame, inherited through lineage (e.g., royalty or celebrity offspring); achieved fame, earned through notable accomplishments (e.g., athletes or artists); and attributed fame,

generated primarily by media visibility rather than expertise (e.g., reality TV stars). He further expands the model with celetoids – figures who attain short-lived media-driven fame – and celectors, fictional characters who temporarily capture public attention (e.g., Borat). These categories serve as a communicative lens for evaluating the symbolic fit between a celebrity and a brand. Celebrities with achieved status are often perceived as more credible and competent, particularly in categories requiring expertise, such as sports or health-related products (Till & Busler, 2000; Rojek, 2001; Mohan, 2025). Their fame is rooted in demonstrable accomplishments, making the symbolic transfer of credibility to a brand more natural and persuasive (Choi, Lee & Kim, 2005; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Hossain et al., 2025). As Rojek (2001) emphasized, achieved fame carries greater cultural legitimacy and is often interpreted by the public as a marker of merit and domain-relevant authority. In contrast, attributed or celetoid fame - despite often commanding high visibility - may raise scepticism due to its constructed and transient nature (Rojek, 2001; Driessens, 2013; Grunwald et al., 2025). These forms of fame are typically generated through media exposure rather than personal achievement, which can lead to lower perceived credibility when the endorsed product requires expertise or trustworthiness (Till & Busler, 2000; Chen et al., 2025). Nonetheless, in lifestyle - oriented sectors such as fashion or beauty, such celebrities may still be perceived as effective endorsers. Their relatability, stylistic influence, and social media presence function as symbolic assets that align with the brand's identity and audience aspirations (Musthofa et al., 2025; Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2018).

Despite the proliferation of fame pathways in the digital age, where visibility can be monetized without traditional achievements (Shelton & Hughes, 2025), Rojek's model remains foundational for interpreting how fame trajectories shape consumer perceptions. Driessens' (2013) concept of celebrity capital further enhances this perspective, framing fame as a form of symbolic capital that can be accumulated and exchanged within specific social fields. In line with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital, Driessens emphasizes that the successful conversion of celebrity capital into symbolic influence depends on the structure of the field, the social valuation of fame, and the individual's cultural capital - which is often more robust in achievement - based fame. This interpretive lens is especially relevant in evaluating brand - celebrity fit. For instance, Gabler (2001) observed that fame has become increasingly detached from traditional markers of merit, suggesting that visibility alone may now constitute value. However, the legitimacy of this fame, and its ability to transfer symbolic value to a brand, is contingent upon how it is perceived and framed within a cultural and social context (Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2001).

In digital environments, scholars such as Abidin (2018) and Marwick (2015) have shown that social media influencers (SMIs), despite typically embodying attributed or celetoid fame, can overcome public scepticism through the production of authentic,

relatable, and transparent content. This reconfigures audience evaluations and enhances perceived credibility, even when the origin of fame is non-traditional. Further illustrating this fluidity, Stewart & Giles (2019) show how personal narratives, including stories of hardship and transformation, can elevate celebrities from attributed to achieved status in the public eye. Their case study of Demi Lovato demonstrates how personal branding and narrative strategy influence not only public perception but also the cultural legitimacy of celebrity personas. Finally, Shelton & Hughes (2025) provide recent insights into Generation Z's perception of fame, revealing a nuanced evaluative approach: audiences weigh not just follower count or screen time, but also the authenticity, talent, and creative agency behind a celebrity's visibility. This reinforces the importance of cultural capital in the evaluation of celebrity-brand congruence and highlights how micro-celebrities and digital creators may offer superior audience alignment in certain branding contexts.

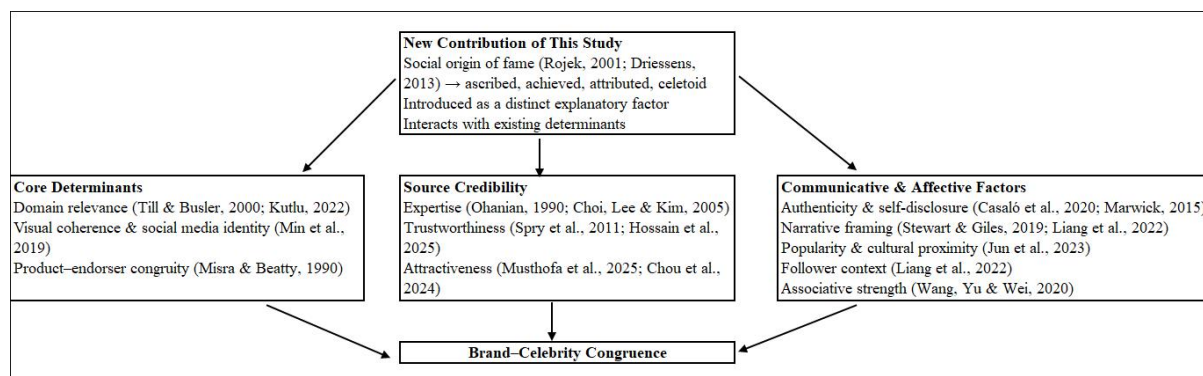
This theoretical intersection between the perceived source of fame and endorsement fit provides a critical framework for understanding how social origin, credibility, and symbolic alignment interact in shaping public responses to celebrity - brand partnerships. The extensive body of work on brand - celebrity congruence has identified a range of factors influencing this relationship, including domain relevance (Till & Busler, 2000; Kutlu, 2022), visual coherence and social media identity (Min et al., 2019), product - endorser congruity (Misra & Beatty, 1990), source credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) (Ohanian, 1990; Spry, Pappu & Cornwell, 2011), authenticity and narrative framing (Casaló et al., 2020; Marwick, 2015; Stewart & Giles, 2019; Liang et al., 2022; Sarkar, Sarkar & Dandotiya, 2024 ), popularity and cultural proximity (Jun et al., 2023), follower context (Liang et al., 2022), and associative strength (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2020). These factors function both as direct determinants of congruence and as moderators that condition its impact on consumer attitudes, credibility perceptions, and purchase intentions.

However, while prior research has systematically addressed credibility, attractiveness, and domain fit, little attention has been paid to how audiences classify the social origin of celebrity fame and how such classifications shape endorsement evaluations. Rojek's (2001) typology of fame, distinguishing between ascribed, achieved, attributed, and celestoid origins, has remained largely conceptual and underexplored in empirical work.

The proposed framework synthesizes the key determinants of brand-celebrity congruence identified in previous literature and highlights the novel contribution of this study (Figure 1.). Core determinants (domain relevance, product-endorser congruity, visual coherence) represent the structural basis of fit. Source credibility factors (expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) capture evaluative dimensions of endorsement effectiveness. Communicative and affective moderators (authenticity, narrative framing, cultural proximity, follower context, associative strength) explain how symbolic meaning

is transferred and reinforced. Positioned as a new contribution, the social origin of fame interacts with these established factors, shaping perceptions of legitimacy and influencing the symbolic transfer of meaning from celebrity to brand.

Figure 1. Framework of Factors Shaping Brand–Celebrity Congruence



Source: Compiled by the authors

This study addresses that gap by positioning fame origin as a distinct explanatory factor in celebrity-brand fit, complementing existing models with a communication-based framework that bridges marketing perspectives and media studies. In doing so, it contributes to an established yet evolving field by reframing a "traditional" topic-brand-celebrity congruence through the underexamined dimension of how audiences perceive and interpret the legitimacy of fame.

### 3. Methodology

The primary objective of this research is to explore how the perceived social origin of celebrity fame influences public perceptions of brand-celebrity congruence in a mediated communication context. The study aims to examine how different types of celebrity status, as classified by Rojek (2001), shape audience interpretations of the symbolic fit between a celebrity and the brand they endorse.

In that sense, the study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do participants recognize a brand through its association with a celebrity endorser?

RQ2: How do participants perceive the congruence between a celebrity and a brand (brand-celebrity fit)?

RQ3: Does the perceived origin of celebrity status influence perceptions of brand-celebrity congruence and endorsement suitability?

The findings in this paper are drawn from a broader quantitative study conducted in August and September 2024, which examined the public's perception of celebrity status, branding power, and image recognition. This analysis focuses specifically on brand-celebrity congruence and the influence of perceived social origin of fame on endorsement appropriateness. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, chosen for its accessibility and effectiveness in capturing digital media engagement (Min et al., 2019). A pilot study was conducted among students at the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, resulting in improved clarity and validity of the final instrument. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items measuring: brand and celebrity recognition, perceived brand-celebrity fit, endorsement suitability, and perceptions of celebrity fame origin (ascribed, achieved, attributed/celebrity). This approach is aligned with previous studies on endorsement credibility and consumer evaluation (Erdogan, 1999; Spry et al., 2011).

To reach a relevant digital audience, the study employed snowball sampling, a method suitable for accessing social media users (Milas, 2005; Noy, 2008; Pavić & Šundalić, 2021). The initial distribution began via Croatian influencer Ana Pulić (113,000+ followers), whose attributed fame and platform visibility aligned with the study's goals (Rojek, 2001; Abidin, 2018). Her network enabled organic dissemination across Instagram and Facebook, targeting a media-engaged population frequently exposed to celebrity-endorsed content (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jin & Phua, 2014).

The study involved 902 participants, recruited via non-probability snowball sampling. The sample was predominantly female (94.6%,  $n = 853$ ) and young, with 64.3% ( $n = 580$ ) aged 18 - 25, 27.1% ( $n = 245$ ) aged 26-35, and 8.6% ( $n = 77$ ) aged 36 and above. Participants included employed individuals (48.4%,  $n = 437$ ), university students (27.4%,  $n = 247$ ), high school students (12.7%,  $n = 114$ ), unemployed individuals (11.2%,  $n = 101$ ), and a small number of retirees (0.2%,  $n = 2$ ). This demographic aligns with digitally active audiences and contemporary celebrity-following patterns relevant to the study's objectives.

To examine how perceived social origin of celebrity status shapes evaluations of brand - celebrity congruence, five well-known brands (Coca - Cola, Huawei Nova, L'Oréal, Dolce & Gabbana, Heineken) were selected and paired with celebrity figures relevant to Croatian media: Ella Dvornik, Kim Kardashian, Kendall Jenner, Luka Modrić, and James Bond. Each celebrity represents a distinct fame type following Rojek's (2001) typology, covering ascribed, achieved, attributed, and celebrity/fictional status.

This framework enabled the analysis of audience interpretations of symbolic alignment between celebrity identity and brand meaning. In doing so, the study contributes to a communication - based understanding of celebrity endorsement as a practice embedded in mediated representation and public discourse.

## 4. Results

**RQ1:** To what extent do participants recognize a brand through its association with a celebrity endorser?

### *Brand and celebrity recognition*

Although frequency analysis indicates that participants were generally well-acquainted with the brands presented in the study, some variation in recognition levels was observed. Product recognition was highest for Coca-Cola, with 100% of respondents (N = 902) reporting familiarity. Other brands also demonstrated high awareness: L'Oréal Paris (99%; N = 893), Heineken (99.4%; N = 897), and Dolce & Gabbana (98.4%; N = 888). In contrast, Huawei Nova 9 had a notably lower recognition rate at 68.5% (N = 618), although this still reflects a majority of the sample.

Similarly, high recognition was reported for the celebrity figures included in the study. The most recognized individual was professional footballer Luka Modrić (99%; N = 893), followed closely by entrepreneur and media personality Kim Kardashian (98.7%; N = 890), and fictional movie character James Bond (97.9%; N = 883). Croatian influencer Ella Dvornik, originally known for her inherited fame, was recognized by 96.3% of respondents (N = 869), while Kendall Jenner, globally known as a fashion model and media figure, was identified by 88.9% (N = 802).

However, when participants were asked whether they were aware of the specific brand endorsements linked to each celebrity, lower recognition rates were recorded. Most respondents reported that they did not know which brands the celebrities endorsed: Ella Dvornik (62.3%; N = 562), Luka Modrić (56.3%; N = 508), Kendall Jenner (57.3%; N = 517), Kim Kardashian (55.9%; N = 504), and James Bond (81.2%; N = 732). The proportion of participants who could identify the correct celebrity-brand link ranged from 44.1% (N = 398) for Kim Kardashian, to only 18.8% (N = 170) for James Bond.

Given these discrepancies between general celebrity and brand recognition versus awareness of their association, the study further explored spontaneous associations through open-ended responses. This approach aimed to capture participants' unprompted mental links between celebrities and brands, offering deeper insight into the strength and direction of perceived endorsement connections beyond aided recall.

### *Free celebrity associations with brands*

To complement the aided brand and celebrity recognition data, participants were asked to freely associate each brand with a celebrity figure. The results reveal consistently low levels of unaided brand-celebrity association. Across all five brands, the dominant response was "I don't know", with over 92% of participants unable to name a celebrity endorser for any given brand. This suggests that while brand and celebrity recognition

levels are high when measured independently, the mental linkage between specific brands and their associated celebrities remains weak among respondents.

Huawei Nova received the clearest association, with 25.7% of participants linking it to Ella Dvornik, followed by Luka Modrić (2.4%). However, 67.6% offered no association at all.

Coca-Cola had 63.4% of respondents unable to identify a celebrity endorser. The most frequent associations were Luka Modrić (21.3%), Ella Dvornik (5.1%), and Santa Claus (3.5%), reflecting perhaps more symbolic or culturally embedded figures rather than strategic ambassadors. L'Oréal was most often linked with Kendall Jenner (20.8%), while 66.6% of participants gave no response. Other low-frequency mentions included Eva Longoria and Kim Kardashian. Dolce & Gabbana saw Kim Kardashian as the top mention (20.4%), while 72.2% of participants did not associate the brand with any celebrity. Heineken had the highest non-response rate (75.5%), though James Bond appeared in 15.9% of responses, reflecting the brand's long-term placement in the film franchise.

These results reinforce the findings from the previous section: while respondents may recognize both brands and celebrities individually, they seldom establish a spontaneous associative link between the two.

#### *Interpretation of celebrity domains associated with brands*

To further understand the nature of these associations, participant responses were categorized based on the celebrity's professional domain - such as influencer, athlete, fashion figure, actor, or singer. While a significant number of system-missing responses limits the strength of interpretation, observed trends reveal meaningful patterns. Influencers were most frequently associated with Huawei (88.7%) and Dolce & Gabbana (77.0%), suggesting that digital personalities are viewed as fitting representatives of tech and luxury fashion brands in the contemporary media landscape. Athletes dominated associations with Coca-Cola (74.7%) and Heineken (70.7%), aligning with both brands' longstanding investment in sports sponsorships and global athletic events. Fashion figures were most closely linked to L'Oréal (64.4%), consistent with the brand's positioning in the beauty and fashion industries.

These findings suggest that audience perceptions of brand - celebrity fit are informed by perceived domain alignment, where the symbolic universe of the celebrity aligns with the cultural meaning of the brand. This insight reinforces the communicative and strategic value of selecting endorsers who reflect the brand's identity not only visually, but also within public perception and media narratives.

Table 1. Dominant celebrity domains by brand

Brand	Most Associated Domain	Valid % of Domain (n)	Interpretation
Huawei Nova	Influencers	88.7% (n = 252)	Perceived as a tech-savvy, youth-oriented brand leveraging digital personalities.
Coca-Cola	Athletes	74.7% (n = 207)	Strongly linked to global sports culture and athletic sponsorships.
L'Oréal	Fashion Figures	64.4% (n = 192)	Aligns with beauty and fashion-focused branding strategies.
Dolce & Gabbana	Influencers	77.0% (n = 191)	Reflects the brand's digital luxury strategy and influencer-driven visibility.
Heineken	Athletes	70.7% (n = 53)	Association with sports events like UEFA and F1 reinforces athletic branding.

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

**RQ2:** How do participants perceive the congruence between a celebrity and a brand (brand-celebrity fit)?

Participants were asked to evaluate the congruence between selected celebrities and specific brands, i.e. whether they perceived a particular celebrity as a suitable representative of a brand using a binary Likert-type item (Yes/No). The results reveal substantial variation in perceived celebrity-brand fit, indicating that alignment is not uniformly recognized across all pairings.

The perceived match was weakest in the case of Ella Dvornik and Huawei, where only 24.2% of respondents (N = 218) believed the pairing was appropriate, while 75.8% (N = 684) indicated a lack of congruence (Table 2.). A similarly low perceived match was found between James Bond and Heineken, with only 28.8% agreeing with the pairing, compared to 71.2% who did not. In contrast, Kendall Jenner and L'Oréal Paris demonstrated the highest congruence, with 68.5% (N = 618) of participants perceiving a strong fit. Kim Kardashian and Dolce & Gabbana also showed high alignment, with 66.5% (N = 600) affirming the match. Meanwhile, Luka Modrić and Coca-Cola yielded more divided perceptions: 34.6% perceived the pairing as congruent, while 65.4% did not.

Table 2. Perceived brand - celebrity congruence

Celebrity	Brand	Perceived Match – Yes (n)	Yes %	No (n)	No %
Ella Dvornik	Huawei	218	24.2%	684	75.8%
Luka Modrić	Coca-Cola	312	34.6%	590	65.4%
Kendall Jenner	L'Oréal Paris	618	68.5%	284	31.5%

Kim Kardashian	Dolce & Gabbana	600	66.5%	302	33.5%
James Bond	Heineken	260	28.8%	642	71.2%

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

These findings suggest that congruence is perceived as strongest when the celebrity's public image, domain of influence, and aesthetic presentation align with the brand's symbolic identity and market positioning. Celebrities rooted in fashion and beauty industries (Kardashian, Jenner) were most positively evaluated, while athletes (Modrić) and fictional characters (Bond) generated more ambivalent responses.

**RQ3:** Does the perceived origin of celebrity status influence perceptions of brand - celebrity congruence and endorsement suitability?

*Perception of celebrity status origin*

To examine how perceived celebrity status origin influences brand-celebrity congruence and endorsement suitability evaluations, respondents categorized five figures using Rojek's (2001) typology: *ascribed*, *achieved*, *attributed*, *celetoid* and *fictional*. Results reveal significant variations in origin perception, providing insights into public interpretations of legitimacy, merit, and media construction in celebrity culture (Turner, 2014; Driessens, 2013).

Ela Dvornik was predominantly recognized as an ascribed celebrity (57.3%, n=517), reflecting the widespread awareness of her inherited fame through her father's public legacy. However, a significant portion (20.5%, n=185) attributed her fame to media visibility, indicating a perceived hybrid status involving both family background and influencer marketing. Notably, only 10.4% (n=94) regarded her fame as achieved through individual efforts, suggesting a limited perception of professional accomplishment as a driver of her visibility. Luka Modrić, on the other hand, was almost unanimously identified with achieved status (94.5%, n=852), reinforcing the public's acknowledgment of meritocratic fame. His association with international sports achievements affirms his status as a figure whose celebrity is grounded in performance and discipline rather than media fabrication or familial connections (Rojek, 2001). Kendall Jenner presents a complex profile, with respondents divided among ascribed status (32.4%, n=292), attributed status (27.1%, n=244), and celetoid (25.5%, n=230). This fragmentation reflects her multifaceted public image - as someone emerging from a famous family, but also heavily promoted through media exposure and short-term branding campaigns (Driessens, 2013). Such a blended perception positions her within the overlapping zones of inherited privilege and constructed visibility. Kim Kardashian was most often perceived as a celetoid (47.0%, n=424), followed by attributed (22.3%, n=201) and ascribed status (15.9%, n=143). This

supports interpretations of her fame as primarily media-manufactured, yet also rooted in visibility and branding expertise. Her public persona, often regarded as emblematic of "being famous for being famous," illustrates how celebrity capital can be strategically cultivated, especially within reality television and social media ecosystems (Turner, 2014; Abidin, 2018). James Bond, a fictional character, was categorized accordingly by a majority (54.3%, n=490), although 26.4% (n=238) of respondents intriguingly classified him under achieved status. This may reflect how audiences internalize fictional heroism as symbolically equivalent to real-life achievement, as emphasized by Marshall (1997) particularly given the long-standing cultural narrative of Bond as a hyper-competent figure associated with prestige, masculinity, and elite lifestyles. These results reveal that audience perceptions of celebrity origin are neither uniform nor strictly bounded by reality, but rather shaped by media narratives and symbolic associations.

*Influence of perceived social origin of fame on brand–celebrity congruence*

To examine whether the perceived social origin of a celebrity’s fame influences public evaluations of brand-celebrity fit, cross-tabulation analyses were conducted for each of the five celebrity-brand pairs. The perceived fame origins were categorized into ascribed, achieved, and attributed status, with celetoid fame conceptually merged into attributed fame due to its media-constructed nature. This methodological adjustment reflects the increasingly blurred boundaries between short-term fame and broader media-driven celebrity construction (Rojek, 2011; Driessens, 2013), particularly relevant for figures like Kim Kardashian and Kendall Jenner. The impact of fame perception was statistically evaluated using Pearson’s Chi-square tests, with a significance threshold of  $p < 0.05$ .

Of the five cases, only Ela Dvornik & Huawei exhibited a statistically significant association ( $\chi^2 = 19.48, p < .001$ ), indicating that the perceived origin of her fame affects how respondents evaluate her brand fit. Participants who believed her fame was achieved were substantially more likely to view her as a suitable brand ambassador (42.6%) than those who perceived her fame as ascribed (21.3%) or attributed (24.9%), as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Crosstabulation of Ela Dvornik’s fame origin and brand fit with Huawei

Fame origin	No (n)	Yes (n)	Total (n)	% Yes
Ascribed status	407	110	517	21.3%
% within fame basis	78.7%	21.3%	100.0%	
Achieved status	54	40	94	42.6%
% within fame basis	57.4%	42.6%	100.0%	

Attributed status (adjusted)	193	64	257	24.9%
% within fame basis	75.1%	24.9%	100.0%	
Total	654	214	868	24.7%

Pearson Chi-Square=19,40, p<.001

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

Although no statistically significant association was found between the perceived origin of fame and brand-celebrity congruence for Kendall Jenner and Kim Kardashian, the response patterns offer theoretically interesting insights into how audiences evaluate endorsement fit when celebrities have complex or media-sustained trajectories. Participants who perceived Kendall Jenner’s fame as achieved were most likely to see her as a good match for L’Oréal Paris (77.8%), followed by those who categorized her fame as ascribed (72.9%) and attributed (69.4%) (Table 4.). While these numerical differences suggest a trend toward greater credibility when fame is viewed as earned, the results indicates that the variation is not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 1.22, p = 0.543$ ).

Table 4. Crosstabulation of Kendall Jenner’s fame origin and brand fit with L’Oréal Paris

Fame Basis	No (n)	Yes (n)	Total (n)	% Yes
Ascribed status	79	213	292	72.9%
% within fame basis	27.1%	72.9%	100.0%	
Achieved status	14	49	63	77.8%
% within fame basis	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%	
Attributed status (adjusted)	145	329	474	69.4%
% within fame basis	30.6%	69.4%	100.0%	
Total	238	591	829	71.3%

Pearson Chi-Square=1,22, p=0.543

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

A similar pattern emerges with Kim Kardashian (Table 5.). The highest congruence was reported by participants who perceived her fame as achieved (77.3%), followed by ascribed (68.5%) and attributed (66.9%). Kim Kardashian’s public image, deeply intertwined with luxury branding, fashion endorsements, and curated social media

presence, likely contributes to her cross-category acceptance as a brand endorser. Despite often being categorized as a celetoid or media-constructed celebrity (Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2014), her aesthetic alignment and luxury lifestyle seem to outweigh concerns about fame authenticity.

Table 5. Crosstabulation of Kim Kardashian’s fame origin and brand fit with Dolce & Gabbana

Fame Basis	No (n)	Yes (n)	Total (n)	% Yes
Ascribed status	45	98	143	68.5%
% within fame basis	31.5%	68.5%	100.0%	
Achieved status	20	68	88	77.3%
% within fame basis	22.7%	77.3%	100.0%	
Attributed status (adjusted)	207	418	625	66.9%
% within fame basis	33.1%	66.9%	100.0%	
Total	272	584	856	68.2%

Pearson Chi-Square=5,22, p=0.073

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

Although Luka Modrić was overwhelmingly perceived as an achieved-status celebrity (94.5%), the perceived brand fit with Coca-Cola did not significantly differ depending on the origin of his fame ( $\chi^2 = 1.60$ ,  $p = 0.450$ ). 33.8% of respondents who considered his fame achieved believed he was a good match for Coca-Cola, compared to 40.0% among those who perceived it as ascribed and 47.4% among those who considered it attributed (Table 6.).

Table 6. Crosstabulation of Luka Modrić’s fame origin and brand fit with Coca-Cola

Fame Basis	No (n)	Yes (n)	Total (n)	% Yes
Ascribed status	3	2	5	40,0%
% within fame basis	60,0%	40,0%	100,0%	
Achieved status	564	288	852	33,8%
% within fame basis	66,2%	33,8%	100,0%	
Attributed status	10	9	19	47,4%

% within fame basis	52,6%	47,4%	100,0%	
Total	577	299	876	34,1%

Pearson Chi-Square=1,60, p=0.450

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

These findings suggest that, despite Modrić’s high credibility as an elite athlete, perceptions of brand congruence are not strongly influenced by fame origin in this context. It is possible that Coca-Cola, as a globally mass-marketed product, does not naturally align with the symbolic space of a disciplined sports figure leading to a neutral evaluation regardless of fame type.

The case of James Bond, a fictional character, offers an interesting contrast (Table 7.). While 41.1% of those who perceived his fame as attributed saw him as a good fit for Heineken, lower agreement was found among those who categorized him as achieved (29.8%) or ascribed (20.0%). However, the chi-square result ( $\chi^2 = 3.95$ ,  $p = 0.139$ ) was not statistically significant, although the linear-by-linear association was marginally significant ( $p = 0.048$ ).

Table 7. Crosstabulation of James Bond’s fame origin and brand fit with Heineken

Fame Basis	No (n)	Yes (n)	Total (n)	% Yes
Ascribed status	8	2	10	20,0%
% within fame basis	80,0%	20,0%	100,0%	
Achieved status	167	71	238	29,8%
% within fame basis	70,2%	29,8%	100,0%	
Attributed status	43	30	73	41,1%
% within fame basis	58,9%	41,1%	100,0%	
Total	218	103	321	32,1%

Pearson Chi-Square=3,95, p=0.139

Source: Authors of the study, 2025

These patterns suggest that respondents may recognize a constructed media-symbolic alignment between Bond and Heineken, likely due to their repeated association in film and advertising. The relatively higher agreement among those who see his fame as attributed (media-created) supports the idea that symbolic exposure and cinematic branding can override ontological distinctions between real and fictional fame (Turner, 2014; Marshall, 1997).

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing theoretical frameworks concerning celebrity endorsement, particularly those foregrounding the relationship between symbolic meaning, domain fit, and the social origin of fame (McCracken, 1989; Rojek, 2001; Driessens, 2013). High recognition levels for both celebrities and brands confirm that contemporary audiences are deeply embedded in celebrity and consumer culture (Turner, 2014). However, the weak spontaneous association between specific brands and their endorsers suggests that visibility, even when frequent, is insufficient to establish enduring symbolic linkages, echoing Till & Busler's (2000) point that domain fit and perceived expertise are essential for fostering congruence. This challenge is intensified by the fragmented and fast-moving nature of fame in the digital era (Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2018).

Results related to perceived brand-celebrity fit underscore the centrality of domain alignment. Celebrities linked to fashion and beauty, such as Kendall Jenner and Kim Kardashian, achieved the highest congruence levels, aligning with prior research on the significance of domain relevance and visual coherence in endorsement effectiveness (Till & Busler, 2000; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Min et al., 2019). By contrast, athletes and fictional characters, despite high recognition, were evaluated less favourably when the symbolic meaning of the brand diverged from their perceived domain (e.g., Luka Modrić with Coca Cola; James Bond with Heineken). This discrepancy supports McCracken's (1989) theory that endorsement effectiveness depends on the successful transfer of culturally resonant meaning.

A major contribution of this research lies in empirically testing Rojek's (2001) typology of celebrity status origins as an explanatory factor in endorsement evaluations. Whereas previous studies have applied this typology primarily in descriptive terms, this study demonstrates its explanatory value: respondents perceiving Ella Dvornik's fame as achieved were almost twice as likely to evaluate her as a suitable brand ambassador compared to those perceiving her fame as ascribed or attributed. This finding supports Driessens' (2013) argument that celebrity capital converts into symbolic capital only under favourable conditions, particularly when associated with merit or expertise, and aligns with Choi, Lee & Kim's (2005) observation that perceived expertise amplifies endorsement persuasiveness.

While no statistically significant associations were observed for other celebrities, descriptive patterns suggest that media-constructed figures such as Kendall Jenner and Kim Kardashian can still achieve favourable evaluations when framed through coherent narratives of authenticity or style. This resonates with Stewart & Giles (2019), who showed how personal narratives can elevate public perceptions by blending achieved and attributed fame, and with research on influencers highlighting the role of authenticity and

aesthetic coherence in building trust (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Casaló et al. (2020) similarly demonstrate that authenticity and self-disclosure increase credibility even when fame is primarily media-driven. These insights collectively indicate that fame origin interacts with narrative framing and domain relevance, shaping evaluations that cannot be explained by congruence or credibility alone.

Overall, these results highlight that fame origin is not assessed in isolation but through broader communicative frames, symbolic associations, and cultural legitimacy (Turner, 2014; Rojek, 2001). By empirically linking the perceived social origin of fame with endorsement fit, this study extends prior literature on congruence and credibility and positions fame origin as a critical variable for understanding endorsement effectiveness in contemporary media culture.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study set out to examine how the social origins of celebrity fame shape audience perceptions of brand-celebrity congruence. By empirically operationalising Rojek's (2001) typology of fame, traditionally used as a descriptive framework, this research demonstrates its explanatory value in endorsement evaluation. The results reveal that perceived achieved fame strengthens endorsement suitability, as shown in the case of Ella Dvornik, where audiences who interpreted her fame as earned were significantly more likely to view her as a credible brand ambassador. This provides empirical support for theories of celebrity capital (Driessens, 2013) and meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989), underscoring that legitimacy and cultural capital enhance symbolic alignment between celebrity and brand.

At the same time, findings show that celebrities with media-constructed or hybrid fame, such as Kendall Jenner and Kim Kardashian, can achieve positive congruence when their personas are framed through authenticity and coherent narratives. This highlights the importance of communicative factors, such as domain relevance, narrative framing, and authenticity in shaping audience evaluations beyond fame origin alone.

The key scientific contribution of this research lies in bridging the "fame-to-fit" gap: it positions the perceived origin of celebrity fame as a measurable variable that interacts with established factors like credibility, authenticity, and domain alignment. In doing so, it extends existing models of endorsement effectiveness and offers a communication-oriented perspective on how audiences interpret symbolic legitimacy in mediated brand partnerships.

Limitations include cultural specificity (a Croatian sample) and the focus on a limited number of celebrities. Future research should employ cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal approaches, and qualitative insights to deepen understanding of how fame

origin and narrative framing co-produce perceptions of endorsement credibility in diverse media contexts.

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## Rezime

Ovaj rad istražuje percepcije publike o poreklu slave poznatih ličnosti i načinu na koji te percepcije oblikuju evaluacije usklađenosti između brenda i celebritija (brand - celebriti kongruencija). Polazište je u razumevanju celebritija kao kulturno i medijski konstruisanih figura, čije značenje prevazilazi puku vidljivost i postaje komunikativni resurs u procesu brendiranja. Prethodna istraživanja u oblasti marketinga i komunikacionih nauka ističu da poznate ličnosti funkcionišu kao semiotički posrednici koji prenose simbolička značenja na brendove (McCracken, 1989; Erdogan, 1999). Međutim, dok su faktori kao što su kredibilitet, ekspertiza, privlačnost i domenska relevantnost detaljno ispitani, relativno je malo pažnje posvećeno pitanju da li publika uopšte prepoznaje i klasifikuje poreklo slave i da li ta klasifikacija utiče na percepciju legitimnosti i prikladnosti u endorserstvu.

Pregled literature pokazuje da su brojna empirijska istraživanja identifikovala činioce koji utiču na usklađenost brenda i poznatih ličnosti. Među osnovnim determinantama posebno se izdvajaju domenska relevantnost, kongruencija između proizvođača i endorsera i vizuelna koherencija (Till & Busler, 2000; Min et al., 2019; Kutlu, 2022). Model izvora kredibiliteta (Ohanian, 1990) naglašava ekspertizu, pouzdanost i atraktivnost kao ključne dimenzije koje utiču na efektivnost poruke. U digitalnom okruženju autentičnost, narativno kadriranje i samootkrivanje postali su presudni u oblikovanju percepcije publike (Casaló et al., 2020; Marwick, 2015), dok kulturna blizina, kontekst pratilaca i asocijativna snaga dodatno modifikuju uticaj (Jun et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2022; Wang, Yu & Wei, 2020). Uprkos ovoj bogatoj literaturi, tipologija porekla slave koju je predložio Rojek (2001) - razlikujući naslednu, postignutu, atribuiranu i tzv. celetoid slavu - ostala je uglavnom konceptualna i nedovoljno empirijski operacionalizovana. Ovim radom se taj jaz nastoji popuniti kroz integraciju percepcije porekla slave kao objašnjavajućeg faktora u evaluaciji usklađenosti brenda i celebritija.

Istraživanje je sprovedeno kvantitativnim putem na uzorku od 902 ispitanika u Hrvatskoj. Kombinovane su metode prepoznavanja brendova i poznatih ličnosti, otvorene asocijacije i procena percepcije pogodnosti pojedinih endorsera u odnosu na određene brendove. Statistička analiza uključila je frekvencijske raspodele, kontingencione tabele i hi-kvadrat testove, sa fokusom na pitanje da li percepcija porekla slave utiče na evaluaciju usklađenosti.

Rezultati pokazuju da je opšta prepoznatljivost brendova i poznatih ličnosti vrlo visoka (npr. Coca-Cola i Luka Modrić prepoznati su od preko 99% ispitanika), ali da su spontana povezivanja između njih slaba. Više od 90% ispitanika nije uspelo da navede nijednog ambasadora brenda kada su imena brendova bila data bez pomoći. Tamo gde su se veze pojavljivale, one su najčešće bile u skladu sa domenom - npr. Modrić je često povezan sa sportskim brendovima, dok su Kendall Jenner i Kim Kardashian asociirane sa modom i kozmetikom. Ovo potvrđuje značaj domenske relevantnosti kao osnovnog kriterijuma za percipiranu kongruenciju.

Kada se posmatraju specifični parovi, najveća usklađenost percipirana je kod Kendall Jenner i L'Oréal Paris (68,5%) te Kim Kardashian i Dolce & Gabbana (66,5%), dok su najslabije ocenjeni parovi Ella Dvornik i Huawei (24,2%) te James Bond i Heineken (28,8%). Ovi nalazi potvrđuju da su modni i kozmetički brendovi najsnažnije povezani sa ličnostima koje potiču iz istog simboličkog univerzuma, dok su sportisti i fiktivni likovi ocenjeni ambivalentnije, čak i kada imaju visoku prepoznatljivost.

Najznačajniji doprinos rada odnosi se na empirijsko testiranje Rojekove tipologije porekla slave. Rezultati za Ellu Dvornik pokazuju statistički značajnu razliku: ispitanici koji su njenu slavu percipirali kao postignutu češće su smatrali da je pogodna za brend (42,6%) u poređenju sa onima koji su je svrstali u naslednu (21,3%) ili atribuiranu (24,9%) kategoriju. Time se potvrđuje da percepcija legitimnosti porekla slave ima direktan uticaj na evaluaciju endorserstva. Kod drugih ispitanih ličnosti statistički značajne razlike nisu utvrđene, ali obrasci sugerišu da percepcija postignute slave generalno podstiče veću kredibilnost. Zanimljivo je da su Kim Kardashian i Kendall Jenner, iako pretežno percipirane kao medijski konstruisane, ostvarile pozitivne evaluacije kada su njihove javne persone bile usklađene sa vrednostima brenda i kada je autentičnost bila naglašena. Ovi nalazi dopunjuju postojeću literaturu ukazujući na to da poreklo slave ne deluje izolovano, već u interakciji sa narativnim kadriranjem, autentičnošću i domenom delovanja. Drugim rečima, publika ne procenjuje samo da li je slava nasledna ili postignuta, već i da li narativ celebritija, njegovo simboličko značenje i estetska koherencija omogućavaju legitimni transfer vrednosti na brend. Time se potvrđuje tvrdnja da brend - celebrity kongruencija treba da se posmatra kao komunikativni proces, a ne samo kao statička procena vizuelnog ili domenskog podudaranja.

Naučni doprinos ovog istraživanja ogleda se u operacionalizaciji percepcije porekla slave kao merljive varijable u evaluaciji endorserstva, čime se proširuju postojeći modeli koji su se fokusirali prvenstveno na kredibilitet, privlačnost ili domensku relevantnost. Ovim radom konceptualna tipologija (Rojek, 2001) dobija empirijsku potvrdu, dok se ujedno povezuje sa teorijama simboličkog i celebrity kapitala (Bourdieu, 1986; Driessens, 2013). Takođe, istraživanje nudi komunikacionu

perspektivu koja pokazuje kako legitimitet porekla slave funkcioniše u digitalizovanom i medijski fragmentisanom okruženju.

Ograničenja istraživanja uključuju kulturnu specifičnost uzorka i fokus na ograničen broj poznatih ličnosti, što otežava generalizaciju nalaza. Buduća istraživanja trebalo bi da se usmere na komparativne studije među različitim kulturama, kao i na kombinaciju kvantitativnih i kvalitativnih metoda kako bi se dublje razumeli narativni procesi i afektivni mehanizmi u evaluaciji usklađenosti brenda i celebritija.

U celini, rad doprinosi staroj temi brend-celebrity kongruencije dodavanjem novog objašnjavajućeg faktora - percepcije porekla slave - i time otvara prostor za dalja istraživanja koja će integrisati kulturne, komunikativne i medijske dimenzije u razumevanje endorserstva u savremenoj potrošačkoj kulturi.

**Ključne reči:** kapital slavnih osoba, podudarnost brenda i slavnih osoba, percepcija podretla slave, medijska reprezentacija.

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