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**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTION OF**  
**CELEBRITIES BY ADOLESCENTS**

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***Abstract***

The study deals with the perceptions of celebrity by Slovak adolescents (N=485). Celebrities are especially important and influential for the target group of adolescents. Adolescence is a stage of life where young people try to establish their individual personality (it is the second stage of the ego-identity formation) and distinguish themselves from others. A quantitative research design, with a semantic differential was employed as the research method. The participating adolescents evaluated and conceptualized the term celebrity with the help of 35 bipolar adjectives, which allowed an investigation of gender differentiation in the perception of celebrities. The findings highlighted the fact that a marketing campaign with a celebrity message can be successful only if the celebrity has the qualities that adolescents appreciate in celebrities: physical attractiveness, inner and social attractiveness, as well as the attractiveness of the leader. This research revealed gender differentiation, particularly that boys and girls rated positively in different features of celebrity.

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**Keywords:** Celebrity, gender, adolescents, semantic differential.



## 1. Introduction

Celebrity is a phenomenon that has grown particularly thanks to the development of modern technologies. According to the popular media, a celebrity is a person who possesses a certain charm and charisma, someone who is a “star” deserving attention. Media and cultural studies describe celebrity as a product of cultural and economic processes (Turner, 2004). According to Dyer (2002), we need to study celebrity through the intertextual relationship between a celebrity and an audience. Celebrities can represent certain models of cultural and behavioural patterns that are attractive, engaging, and inspirational for the audience (Dix, Phau, & Pougnet, 2010). Celebrity is also described as a person known to masses of anonymous people who want to know more and more about the celebrity (Sternheimer, 2011).

With the growing popularity of online media, the literature defines a *micro-celebrity* (Senft, 2008). These are the people who make videos, podcasts, write blogs, and use social sites to raise their popularity among their readers, viewers, and listeners. This group can consist of food bloggers, fashion bloggers/vloggers, Instagram bloggers, or people blogging about travelling, design, work-outs, healthy lifestyle, and so on. Another term we find in the context of celebrity is a *subcultural* or *local celebrity* (Hills, 2003; Ferris, 2010), known only to a small audience that supports them. According to Marshall (2006), the celebrity culture is anchored in national and multinational cultures. The celebrity culture is important for social integration (Rojek, 2001), and for development of social identity.

Celebrities are especially important and influential for the target group of adolescents. Adolescence is a stage of life where young people try to establish their individual personality (it is the second stage of the ego-identity formation) and distinguish themselves from others. It is therefore a very important identity-formation stage of life (Juříková & Kocourek, 2017). Adolescents try to imitate, copy, simulate idols whom they find attractive and admirable. For many adolescents, their identity is constructed by the interaction with the celebrities presented in the popular media. In adolescence, a period typical for first loves, an idealization of celebrities is notable and a *parasocial relationship* is created. This relationship is characterised by fantasising, daydreaming, creating a mental model representing a fictitious relationship between the adolescent and the celebrity. The danger here is that the individual can stop distinguishing between the fantasy and the reality which can lead to loss of control over one’s own life.

We can find several scholars explaining the concept of parasocial relationships (PSRs): the social-affective response of media users to personae in the media (Giles, 2002; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). On the one hand, the research focused on infatuation with famous people and celebrities belonging to different age category (Giles, 2002; Giles & Maltby, 2004; Maltby, Giles, Barber, Mccutcheon, 2005). On the other hand, it was shown that parasocial process has a supporting role in the identity-forming during adolescence (Gile & Maltby, 2004). Thus, the parasocial processes can be helpful in the formation of adolescents’ autonomy. It is so especially because adolescents confront how they view themselves with how they view people they consider their idols. These idols can be famous people from the media and celebrities (Giles & Maltby, 2004; Madison & Porter, 2015). What media or sports celebrities are the objects of parasocial interaction can show us which of their characteristics are attractive to the audiences.

According to Steele and Brown (1995), media activities determine adolescents’ cognition and behaviour, and sometimes regulate the mood of the audience. As mentioned above, the parasocial

relationship can have a positive impact on the identity-forming process during adolescence, which can be explained by Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968). Adolescents in the process of identity-forming imagine a relationship with people who can be a part of the media environment, which represents a safe space for experimenting with different roles. It is important to note that the identity-forming process in adolescence is gender-differentiated. Such gender differences can manifest in the parasocial interaction where girls engage in parasocial activities more frequently and more intensely than boys (Cohen, 2003; Maltby, Giles, Barber, & Mccutcheon, 2005). Girls' larger engagement is not only cognitive but also emotional (Rhodes, 2002). It is therefore important to look at the attitudes towards celebrities and whether such differences can be found there as well.

## 2. Problem Statement

The research is focused on the gender differences in adolescents in the attitude towards the concept CELEBRITY.

## 3. Research Questions

Based on the theoretical background, the following research question was formulated: What are the gender differences in adolescents in the attitude towards the concept celebrity? It was hypothesised that: Girls would have more positive attitude towards the concept of celebrity than boys.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the semantic space of the concept of celebrity by Slovak adolescents. In other words, the aim was to identify the connotative meaning of the term celebrity.

## 5. Research Methods

The study examines the perceptions of celebrity by Slovak adolescents (N=485) at the age range of 16-24 (AM=18.9 years). A quantitative research design was used. The research method was the semantic differential with a 7-point scale of bipolar adjectives (1 = adjective with a negative connotation, 7 = adjective with a positive connotation) (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957).

The method of semantic differential was used to find the connotative (subjective) meaning of presented terms. In our case, we used the term CELEBRITY. The choice of bipolar adjectives was based on the pilot study, as well as on the topic of the research. Therefore, adolescents assessed the term CELEBRITY on the 7-point scale of 35 bipolar adjectives: 1. *Attractive/repulsive*; 2. *Exclusive/ordinary*; 3. *Pretty/ugly*; 4. *Elegant/tasteless*; 5. *Sexy/not sexy*; 6. *Reliable/dubious*; 7. *Honourable/unprincipled*; 8. *Honest/false*; 9. *Trustworthy/misleading*; 10. *Experienced/inexperienced*; 11. *Skilled/clumsy*; 12. *Socially responsible/socially irresponsible*; 13. *Intelligent/stupid*; 14. *Nice/unlikeable*; 15. *Comfortable/uncomfortable*; 16. *Sophisticated/simple*; 17. *Organized/chaotic*; 18. *Rational/emotional*; 19. *Modest/vain*; 20. *Caring/careless*; 21. *Qualified/amateurish*; 22. *Familial/solitary*; 23. *Tactful/insolent*; 24. *Sober/impractical*; 25. *Strong/weak*; 26. *Confident/insecure*; 27. *Enthusiastic/indifferent*; 28.

*Decisive/hesitant; 29. Athletic/unathletic; 30. Gentle/rough; 31. Calm/tense; 32. Dominant/submissive; 33. Masculine/feminine; 34. Public/private; 35. Bold/shy.*

## 6. Findings

The findings showed adolescents' overall positive attitude towards the term CELEBRITY, without gender differentiation (AM=4.75).

Predominating evaluations were the following: *confident* (AM=6.05), *public* (AM=6.0), *bold* (AM=5.92), *pretty* (AM=5.83), *exclusive* (AM=5.82), *elegant* (AM=5.79), *attractive* (AM=5.78), *sexy* (AM=5.60), *dominant* (AM=5.47), *experienced* (AM=5.46), *enthusiastic* (AM=5.29), *decisive* (AM=5.27), *strong* (AM=5.12), *qualified* (AM=5.11), *comfortable* (AM=5.01), but also *vain* (AM=2.61).

The overall attitude towards the concept of celebrity did not statistically differ between the boys (AM=4.63) and the girls (AM=4.85).

However, when we looked at the particular adjective pairs, the gender differentiation was evident in the following bipolar adjectives, with girls giving more positive evaluation than boys in all of them, apart from 19. *Modest/vain* ( $t=2.853$ ,  $p=0.005$ ); 3. *Pretty/ugly* ( $t=-3.587$ ,  $p=0.000$ ); 11. *Skilled/clumsy* ( $t=-3.476$ ,  $p=0.001$ ); 16. *Sophisticated/simple* ( $t=-2.709$ ,  $p=0.007$ ); 19. *Modest/vain* ( $t=2.853$ ,  $p=0.005$ ); 25. *Strong/weak* ( $t=-5.116$ ,  $p=0.000$ ); 26. *Confident/insecure* ( $t=-4.868$ ,  $p=0.000$ ); 27. *Enthusiastic/indifferent* ( $t=-2.930$ ,  $p=0.004$ ); 28. *Decisive/hesitant* ( $t=-3.437$ ,  $p=0.001$ ); 29. *Athletic/unathletic* ( $t=-2.528$ ,  $p=0.012$ ); 32. *Dominant/submissive* ( $t=-3.414$ ,  $p=0.001$ ); 34. *Public/private* ( $t=-2.728$ ,  $p=0.007$ ); 35. *Bold/shy* ( $t=-4.205$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) (Table 01).

Adolescent girls perceived the celebrity in a more positive way than boys. Girls saw the celebrity as: *pretty*, *skilled*, *sophisticated*, *strong*, *confident*, *enthusiastic*, *decisive*, *athletic*, *dominant*, *public*, and *bold*. Adolescent boys ascribed a smaller amount of *vain* to celebrity than girls.

**Table 01.** Gender differences in perception of the term CELEBRITY (only statistically significant differences are mentioned)

Adjectives	Gender	AM	SD	t-test	Sig.
Pretty/ugly	Boy	5.57	1.557	-3.587	0.000***
	Girl	6.03	1.212		
Skilled/clumsy	Boy	4.52	1.632	-3.476	0.001***
	Girl	5.03	1.587		
Sophisticated/simple	Boy	4.58	1.667	-2.709	0.007**
	Girl	5.01	1.741		
Modest/vain	Boy	2.85	1.673	2.853	0.005**
	Girl	2.43	1.516		
Strong/weak	Boy	4.73	1.482	-5.116	0.000***
	Girl	5.43	1.486		
Confident/insecure	Boy	5.69	1.644	-4.868	0.000***
	Girl	6.32	1.219		
Enthusiastic/indifferent	Boy	5.03	1.702	-2.930	0.004**
	Girl	5.49	1.691		
Decisive/hesitant	Boy	5.00	1.538	-3.437	0.001***

	Girl	5.49	1.580		
Athletic/unathletic	Boy	4.66	1.310	-2.528	0.012*
	Girl	4.99	1.479		
Dominant/submissive	Boy	5.22	1.409	-3.414	0.001***
	Girl	5.67	1.478		
Public/private	Boy	5.77	1.686	-2.728	0.007**
	Girl	6.17	1.553		
Bold/shy	Boy	5.61	1.518	-4.205	0.000***
	Girl	6.15	1.321		

Note: \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

## 7. Conclusion

The general knowledge goes that the present-day celebrities can significantly influence attitudes and opinions of consumers, in both the commercial and social environment. Without a desire for personal financial gain, celebrities' comment on social issues, engage in campaigns (e.g., for animal protection, against war, for environment protection), by which they fulfil the role of an idol and advisor.

This has a big importance for the marketing communication which can subsequently design the communication process more accurately, based on the attitude of the focus group towards the celebrity. In our case, a substantial gender differentiation in adolescents' attitudes towards celebrities was not found, however, a slight bias towards positive evaluation was noticeable in girls.

Adolescent boys and girls perceive celebrity positively, and that they acknowledge especially physical attributes (e.g., *pretty*, *athletic*), mental attributes (e.g., *decisive*, *bold*, *confident*), and skills.

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