

It's All About Me (Or Is It Us?): The Narrative Antecedents of the Locus of Celebrity

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ABSTRACT For two decades, research on individual and organizational celebrity has flourished. However, the literature remains limited in several ways. First, despite recent gains regarding the antecedents of celebrity, current theory does not fully explain why celebrity resides at a specific locus (i.e., at the individual- and/or organizational level). Second, research has suggested that both the media and organizations play significant roles in celebrity attainment. However, researchers have focused more on the media's role in creating celebrity narratives and less on the role that organizational communications play in the narrative process and how they affect the locus of celebrity. Lastly, research has provided a fragmented picture of individual and organizational celebrity, disregarding that organizations and their leaders can share high degrees of positive attention (i.e., have concurrent celebrity) that likely have different effects than celebrity located at only one locus. We address these issues by integrating celebrity research across multiple loci to develop a theory of the narrative antecedents of the locus of celebrity. In doing so, we explain how organizations can actively create individual, organizational, or concurrent celebrity.

Keywords: CEO celebrity, narrative theory, organizational celebrity, social evaluations

INTRODUCTION

Celebrity – a label often ascribed to entertainers, athletes, and prominent actors – is an observable phenomenon in modern society (Gamson, 1992; Kjærgaard et al., 2011; Lovelace et al., 2018; Rindova et al., 2006). The intensification of business media

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coverage (Chouliaraki and Morsing, 2009; Kjaer and Langer, 2005) has also made it possible for firms and their leaders to become celebrities – that is, social actors that elicit high levels of public attention and positive emotional responses from constituents (Lovelace et al., 2018; Rindova et al., 2006). Constituents comprise individuals with the potential to interact with an organization, including engaged stakeholders and more diffuse observers (Zavyalova et al., 2017).

Research on the antecedents of celebrity shows that the media, CEOs, and organizations play important roles in the development of individual and organizational celebrity (e.g., Hayward et al., 2004; Lovelace et al., 2018; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017). On the one hand, the media *pull* non-conforming leaders and organizations into the limelight (Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006). On the other hand, organizations and their leaders *push* themselves into the limelight by providing information about their idiosyncratic and socially significant characteristics (Chatterjee and Pollock, 2017; Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017).

Notwithstanding their significance, the recent theoretical and empirical advancements on the antecedents of celebrity have not provided a clear understanding of what determines its locus. For example, the launch of an industry-disrupting product can lead to individual or organizational celebrity, or both. Yet, the value of celebrity and the appropriability of such value depend on its locus (Rindova et al., 2006). Moreover, by focusing on the role of media narratives in creating dramatized realities at the centre of celebrity development, research has not fully addressed how organizational communications can affect the narrative process and their role in determining the locus of celebrity. Yet, in the current social media culture, organizations have much more direct access to audiences. Lastly, research has disregarded that organizations and their leaders can share high positive attention (e.g., Ingvar Kamprad & Ikea) – a construct we call *concurrent celebrity*. This is an important oversight because concurrent celebrity may have differential yet critical implications for stakeholders' cognition, as well as organizational decision-making and outcomes. For example, concurrent celebrity may affect the extent to which celebrity CEOs become overconfident and develop an enlarged sense of authority (Lovelace et al., 2018; Pollock et al., 2023).

Drawing from narrative theory (Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980; Gerrig, 1993; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) and celebrity research (Lovelace et al., 2022; Pfarrer et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017), we address these limitations by focusing on how an organization can push a locus of celebrity onto audiences (i.e., the media and other constituents) by making different narrative elements more prominent in its communications. Specifically, we theorize that the narrative story – that is, *what* is told – and the narrative discourse – that is, *how* it is told (Chatman, 1978) – affect how audiences construct meaning from them, allowing an organization to influence its celebrity locus. First, we theorize that elements of the narrative story – that is, main and secondary characters, plots, and the consistency between them – affect the locus of celebrity. Second, we suggest how elements of the narrative discourse – that is, narrator and narratee – affect these relationships.

Our theorizing offers three primary contributions. First, we enhance celebrity research by developing a theory of the narrative antecedents of the locus of celebrity that allows us to discern why celebrity resides at the individual and/or organizational level. This is

an important contribution, as research on the outcomes of celebrity has suggested that its value may be contingent upon its locus. Second, we deepen current knowledge of organizational communications' role as a celebrity antecedent (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006). In doing so, we contribute to research on how organizations actively affect the construction of celebrity by focusing on how their communications influence the locus of celebrity. This is particularly important given how easily modern organizations can directly communicate with their constituents via social media (Wang et al., 2021). Finally, our framework integrates celebrity research across loci by addressing situations in which individual and organizational celebrity are concurrent. In doing so, we address an important phenomenon overlooked by current theory and develop more comprehensive arguments reflecting salient industry examples, such as Apple and Steve Jobs, Tesla and Elon Musk and Amazon and Jeff Bezos. In sum, we integrate celebrity research across multiple loci and offer organizations practical insights on how to make it about 'me' or 'us'.

INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CELEBRITY: A REVIEW

Over the past two decades, research on social evaluations has made significant progress in distinguishing celebrity from other social approval assets. Encompassing high attention and positive emotional responses from constituents (Pollock et al., 2019), celebrity is conceptually distinct from other social evaluations such as legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995), reputation (Rindova et al., 2005), status (Washington and Zajac, 2005), and infamy (Pollock et al., 2016) along the following dimensions: its theoretical foundations, sociocognitive content, stability, development process, and mechanisms driving outcomes. For instance, as we show in Appendix A, celebrity differs from legitimacy in that (1) its theoretical foundations are rooted in the sociology of mass media (Rindova et al., 2006) rather than in institutional theory; (2) its main sociocognitive content is emotional (Pollock et al., 2019) rather than cognitive, moral, or pragmatic; (3) it is more transitory (Zavyalova et al., 2017) rather than stable; (4) it develops via the media creation of dramatized realities (Rindova et al., 2006) rather than via external validation provided by conformity and social ties; and (5) its positive effects on a social actor's exchange relationships are driven by high arousal and perceived attractiveness (Pollock et al., 2019) rather than by a sense of acceptance and endorsement.

Notably, researchers have considered celebrity distinct from its negative counterpart – namely, infamy (Pollock et al., 2016). Unlike other social approval assets such as reputation, celebrity is an exclusively positive evaluation and thus ranges from neutral to positive (see Pollock et al., 2019). As Pollock and colleagues reviewed, 'this structure reflects the fact that positive and negative emotions operate along separate continua (Rozin and Royzman, 2001), generating high and low levels of fundamentally different experiences and behaviours' (2019, p. 464). Despite this distinction, infamy can develop for celebrity organizations when constituents interpret and identify with socially salient events differently (Pollock et al., 2016; Zavyalova et al., 2017). Thus, celebrity and infamy can coexist as independent interpretations in such a way that the dominantly positive narratives of a celebrity organization resonate only among some constituents (Zavyalova et al., 2017)

and exclude narratives about its infamous features that instead remain salient among other constituents (e.g., Boje, 1995; Hampel and Dalpiaz, 2023). Given our specific focus on understanding the locus of the celebrity, we assume positive evaluations as our starting point. That is, our theory centres on the subset of constituents that positively evaluate a social actor's behaviour.

Organizational researchers have studied celebrity at both the individual and organizational loci. Regarding the former, early studies lacked a formal definition, often conflating celebrity with other social approval assets such as status and reputation (e.g., Graffin et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2006) or defining it in terms of its antecedents – for example, action non-conformity (Hayward et al., 2004). Regarding the latter, the theoretical underpinnings of celebrity are more solidly grounded in Rindova and colleagues' definition of celebrity as consisting of 'high levels of public attention and positive emotional responses' (2006, p. 50) as demonstrated by subsequent theoretical and empirical work (e.g., Hubbard et al., 2018; Pfarrer et al., 2010; Pollock et al., 2019; Zavyalova et al., 2017). In an initial effort to unify the two research streams (Graffin et al., 2012), some scholars have converged on a definition of individual celebrity among executives and CEOs that parallels the definition of organizational celebrity (Chatterjee and Pollock, 2017; Lovelace et al., 2018, 2022; Pollock et al., 2019, 2023).

Building on these recent contributions, we define individual and organizational celebrities as those social actors who attract heightened attention and elicit strong, positive emotional responses. Thus, the first definitional aspect of celebrity is heightened attention (Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006). Following Rindova et al. (2006, p. 50), we characterize this celebrity aspect as 'large-scale public attention'. The attentional aspect of celebrity has been measured via proxies of media visibility – for example, the number of articles mentioning a CEO (Lovelace et al., 2022) or organization (Pfarrer et al., 2010).

The second definitional aspect of celebrity is strong, positive emotional responses (Lovelace et al., 2022; Pollock et al., 2019; Rindova et al., 2006). Following Pollock et al. (2019, p. 449), we characterize the emotional aspects of celebrity 'as high levels of arousal which lead to [positive] emotional responses that can dominate evaluation and decision-making processes'. This arousal derives from the excitement and engagement that some individuals or organizations evoke among their audiences (Pfarrer et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2006). The emotional aspect of celebrity has often been measured via the tenor (sentiment) of media coverage received by CEOs (Lovelace et al., 2022) and organizations (Pfarrer et al., 2010).

Lastly, although many researchers have treated celebrity as binary (e.g., Hubbard et al., 2018; Pfarrer et al., 2010), recent contributions have argued for and adopted an ordinal conceptualization of the construct in which A-list celebrities are very well known and admired among constituents, and B-list celebrities are moderately well known and admired (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2022; Pollock et al., 2019, 2023).

Celebrity Loci and Outcomes

Although organizations may welcome celebrity as an organizational resource regardless of its locus, managing the locus at which celebrity resides is important to firms for multiple reasons. First, research on the outcomes of celebrity and related social

approval assets suggests that CEO and organizational celebrity may have relevant yet potentially different effects on organizational outcomes. Specifically, while organizational celebrity can facilitate stakeholders' positive interpretations of earnings surprises (Pfarrer et al., 2010) and underpricing (Hubbard et al., 2018), individual celebrity may have long-term adverse effects on market performance, as celebrity CEOs may be overconfident and more likely to engage in activities detracting from their core responsibilities (Lovelace et al., 2018; Pollock et al., 2023). These potential differences in the consequences of celebrity create an incentive for organizations to manage the locus of celebrity.

Second, related research on star CEOs shows that they can command higher pay (Graffin et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2006). Specifically, Wade and colleagues found that when CEOs win media-sponsored awards, they receive approximately a 10 per cent immediate pay increase relative to non-star CEOs and continue to be remunerated more (Wade et al., 2006). Moreover, the pay gap between CEOs and their top management team members widens when organizational performance increases under the leadership of a celebrated CEO (Graffin et al., 2008). To explain these findings, researchers argue that winning media-sponsored awards generates heightened attention and positive emotional responses – the core elements of celebrity (Lovelace et al., 2018). As such, these findings suggest that CEO celebrity may engender similar effects on CEO pay compensation, indicating 'that the "ownership" of celebrity leads to the ability to appropriate its economic benefits' (Rindova et al., 2006, p. 52). Relatedly, celebrity remains relatively mobile across organizations when residing in an individual, further hindering its potential value as a strategic resource leading to sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Graffin et al., 2012). These insights from the celebrity and related literature point to the idea that organizations and their leaders may have reasons to want to manage its locus.

Third, celebrity may have differential implications for organizational change processes depending on its locus. On the one hand, theory suggests that celebrity CEOs leading celebrity organizations may resist organizational change, as celebrity creates socio-cognitive shackles that compel them to persist in the same patterns of celebrity-generating behaviours (Lovelace et al., 2018). On the other hand, celebrity CEOs of non-celebrity organizations may be able to promote stakeholders' buy-in to change initiatives, which reduces resistance and facilitates the implementation of strategic change. To the extent that celebrity CEOs behave non-conformingly (Hayward et al., 2004), individual celebrity may provide a congruent interpretative frame, reducing stakeholders' interpretive uncertainty when evaluating organizational change and facilitating its implementation. Therefore, organizations may want to manage the locus of celebrity during organizational change processes to avoid its 'shackles' and leverage its benefits.

Overall, these considerations highlight the importance of organizations managing the locus of celebrity. Next, we review the antecedents of individual and organizational celebrity.

Celebrity Loci and Antecedents

Research on the antecedents of celebrity has shown it emerges as the media *pull* demographically atypical leaders – for example, women and people of colour – into the limelight

(Lovelace et al., 2022). Similarly, the media lavish attention on CEOs and organizations that take positively evaluated non-conforming actions (Lovelace et al., 2022) – that is, actions that either overconform to prevailing industry and societal norms and are positively evaluated or actions that underconform to norms but are evaluated positively (Rindova et al., 2006). Overall, atypical characteristics and non-conforming actions allow the media to write dramatized realities that focus on character development, portray change as conflict, and over-attribute conflict resolution to the main character (Rindova et al., 2006).

Both demographic atypicality and positively evaluated non-conformity facilitate heightened attention (Fiske and Taylor, 2013) and newsworthiness (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006) as well as positive emotional responses from audiences. Demographic atypicality allows the media to write and audiences to envision heroic tropes in which underdogs overcome long odds to success (Campbell, 2008; Lovelace et al., 2022). This facilitates ‘an emotional connection for audiences, who may be inspired by these rare CEOs’ achievements’ (Lovelace et al., 2022, p. 1175). Similarly, positively evaluated action non-conformity facilitates audiences’ emotional responses by increasing their excitement for and identification with the social actor (Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017).

Celebrity can also emerge as organizations (Rindova et al., 2006) and their leaders (Chatterjee and Pollock, 2017; Lovelace et al., 2022) *push* themselves into the media limelight by providing information about their idiosyncratic characteristics (Lovelace et al., 2022), as well as salient and socially significant elements of their identities (Zavyalova et al., 2017). Providing this information to the media and other organizational constituents facilitates audiences’ attention and emotional responses. For example, Lovelace and colleagues found that CEO push tactics (i.e., CEO prominence in firms’ press releases and on Twitter) are positively related to individual celebrity.

Overall, work across the two loci has highlighted the actors – that is, CEOs, organizations (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2022), the media (e.g., Rindova et al., 2006), and other constituents (e.g., Zavyalova et al., 2017) – that are involved in creating celebrity. The media, in particular, have taken a central role in research on celebrity development as they forge the dramatized realities at the centre of celebrity production (Rindova et al., 2006). However, the primary focus on the media has limited our understanding of the antecedents of celebrity in several ways.

First, although research has advanced our understanding of how certain CEOs (e.g., Hayward et al., 2004; Lovelace et al., 2022) *or* some organizations (e.g., Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017) become celebrities, it has not directly addressed what determines the locus. For example, researchers have identified an organization’s non-conforming actions and characteristics as central to celebrity development at both loci (Hayward et al., 2004; Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006). Yet, it remains unclear when those non-conforming actions lead to organizational celebrity instead of or in addition to CEO celebrity.

Second, by focusing on the media’s role in creating narratives that build the dramatized reality at the core of celebrity development (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2018; Rindova et al., 2006), research has not adequately addressed how organizations can affect the locus of celebrity via their communications (see Zavyalova et al., 2017). Information subsidies are a critical source of detail about a social actor’s idiosyncratic characteristics (Hayward et al., 2004; Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017)

and can influence the media agenda (Atwater et al., 1987) in terms of frequency of coverage (Ohl et al., 1995; Pollock and Rindova, 2003) and how interpretations are conveyed (Ohl et al., 1995). Moreover, in the social media era, organizations can reach their constituents more directly (Wang et al., 2021). As such, organizational communications may play a more significant role in forging the dramatized reality at the centre of celebrity than has been previously considered.

Finally, current research has rendered celebrity theory incomplete by theorizing and examining individual and organizational celebrity mainly in isolation. As shown in Figure 1, individual celebrity can exist without its organizational counterpart (Rindova et al., 2006) – for example, Warren Buffett at Berkshire Hathaway – and vice versa – for example, Ben Silbermann at Pinterest. However, individuals and their organizations may also share the spotlight (i.e., concurrent celebrity). Indeed, many examples used to represent individual or organizational celebrity separately are more appropriately described as examples of concurrent celebrity. As such, individual and organizational celebrity co-occurrence may have meaningful (and undertheorized) implications for stakeholders' cognition, managerial decision-making, and organizational outcomes. For example, concurrent celebrity may affect the extent to which celebrity CEOs become overconfident and develop an enlarged sense of authority (Lovelace et al., 2018; Pollock et al., 2023).

Overall, these issues signal the need to further integrate theory on the antecedents of individual and organizational celebrity. We address this need by bridging individual and organizational research to explain how organizations can affect the locus of celebrity. Specifically, we leverage insights from narrative theory (Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980; Gerrig, 1993; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) and celebrity theory (Lovelace et al., 2022) to develop arguments

| | | Individual Celebrity | |
|--------------------------|-----|--|---|
| | | No | Yes |
| Organizational Celebrity | No | | The Honest Co. – J. Alba (U.S.) Virgin Group – R. Branson (U.S.) Berkshire Hathaway – W. Buffett (U.S.) Harpo Productions – O. Winfrey (U.S.) Reliant Industries – M. Ambani (India) Fiat Chrysler Automobiles – S. Marchionne (Italy) Grupo Futuro – R. Sevilla (Ecuador) Won soju – J. Park (South Korea) |
| | Yes | Netflix – R. Hastings & T. Sarandos (U.S.) Pinterest – B. Silbermann (U.S.) Volvo AB – M. Lundstedt (Sweden) Corporación Favorita – R. Martínez (Ecuador) Marimekko – Tiina Alahuhta-Kasko (Finland) Gentle Monster – Han-gook Kim (South Korea) Naver – Soo-Yeon Choi (South Korea) Didi – Cheng Wei (China) | Amazon & J. Bezos (U.S.) Apple & S. Jobs (U.S.) Tesla & E. Musk (U.S.) Facebook (Meta) & M. Zuckerberg (U.S.) Ikea & I. Kamrad (Sweden) Spotify & D. Ek (Sweden) Flipkart & S. Bansal (India) Tata Motors & G. Wagh (India) Grupo Noboa & Á. Noboa (Ecuador) Nokia & J. Ollila (Finland) LG & K.-M. Koo (South Korea) Ottogi & Y.-J. Ham (South Korea) Alibaba & J. Ma (China) Huawei Technologies & R. Zhengfei (China) |

Figure 1. Celebrity loci

regarding how organizations can use narrative elements in their communications to focus audiences' attention and emotional responses towards their desired celebrity locus.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND THE LOCUS OF CELEBRITY

Organizational communications include press releases – that allow organizations to influence the media directly – and other materials such as books, websites, and social media accounts – that allow organizations to communicate with other constituents more directly (Wang et al., 2021). Such communications often promote specific narratives ‘to configure “an initial state of affair, an event or action, and a consequent state of affair” (Czarniawska, 1998, p. 2) “into a temporal unity” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5)’ (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018, pp. 666–7).

Narratives are important to organizational life and have received attention across various disciplines (Brown, 2006; Currie and Brown, 2003), shaping audiences' interpretations of organizations' and leaders' actions and characteristics. For example, narratives are critical for newer organizations to gain recognition in the marketplace, as they are ‘an integral part of the process by which founders construct new ventures, acquire needed capital, and generate wealth’ (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994, p. 545; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Similarly, narratives are essential for established organizations, as managers use them to construct meaning to initiate (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) and implement change (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018; Sonenshein, 2010).

Audiences seeking to comprehend organizational communications draw from information and heuristics to interpret and construct meaning from the situations described (Johnson-Laird, 1983; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983; Zwaan and Radvansky, 1998). Thus, building on narrative theory (Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980) and scholarship on the narrative-mind nexus (Herman, 2012), we first theorize that audiences use the narrative story – that is, *what* is told in organizational communication (Chatman, 1978) – as an informational cue to draw inferences that affect their interpretation of organizational communications and thus the locus of celebrity.^[1] Specifically, we theorize that organizations can influence the locus of their celebrity by predominantly adopting specific characters (P1, P2) and plots (P3) and by doing so consistently (P4), as such elements of the narrative story determine the locus at which audiences will focus their attention and positive emotional arousal – the two constituting elements of celebrity.

Second, we suggest that the narrative discourse – that is, *how* a story is told (Chatman, 1978) – has important implications for these primary relationships. Specifically, we suggest that using a homodiegetic narrator (i.e., a narrator that is also a main character) may influence how effectively the predominance of specific main characters can determine celebrity locus (P5). Similarly, we suggest that the predominance of a second-person narratee determines the effectiveness of main characters and plots in affecting celebrity locus (P6, P7).^[2]

Narrative Story

A narrative story refers to the content of the narrative and includes the *characters* and the *plots* delineating the events they partake in. Characters are vital elements of the narrative

story (Chatman, 1978) and 'verbally represent human-[like] beings through the action, speech, description, and commentary created by the author' (Hastuti, 2023, p. 88). To the extent that 'narratives are always about someone or something' (Pentland, 1999, p. 712), a narrative story is created to describe how characters act and react to the narrated events (Hastuti, 2023). A narrative story often includes main and secondary characters. Next, we formally theorize how each of these narrative story elements affects the locus of celebrity.

Main characters. Main characters serve a central structural position in the narrative story – that is, the principal causal agents behind the reported actions – and, relative to secondary characters, are described with more specific and distinctive traits (Bal, 2009; Pentland, 1999). Organizational communications often cast an individual or the organization as the main character (Lovelace et al., 2022; Rindova et al., 2006). Based on the sociocognitive content of celebrity – that is, heightened attention and positive emotional responses – we offer two reasons why the predominance of a main character in communications regarding an event affects how audiences interpret them and thus the celebrity locus.

First, main characters are central to narration as they play an agentic role and are constructed with information highlighting their idiosyncratic characteristics and distinctive actions (Bal, 2009). This centrality makes them more salient than other characters (Fiske and Taylor, 2013), thus increasing the likelihood that heightened attention – a central component of celebrity – will be focused on the same locus. Moreover, the centrality of main characters in the narrative story renders them more cognitively accessible, making information about them easier to recall – 'as recently and frequently activated ideas come to mind more easily' (Fiske and Taylor, 2013, p. 73). In turn, accessibility increases the likelihood that audiences will use these characters to form attributions when interpreting information regarding an organization's non-conforming actions and characteristics. Thus, as organizations increase the centrality, salience, and accessibility of a specific main character through their communications, audiences' attention becomes focused on that locus.

Second, audiences tend to process the emotional implications of narrative events based on the main character's point of view (Coplan, 2004; Gernsbacher et al., 1992). By feeling empathy – that is, an imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion for which individuals understand and experience another's emotions through perspective-taking (Cuff et al., 2016) – audiences adopt the main character's point of view and experience their emotions (Coplan, 2004, p. 143). This increases emotional engagement and identification with the main character (Coplan, 2004) and facilitates the activation of same-locus emotional evaluations. Thus, as organizations foster empathy, emotional engagement, and identification with the main character through their communications, they can affect the locus of celebrity by focusing audiences' emotions – which, with attention, are central to the sociocognitive content of celebrity (Pollock et al., 2019) – on a specific locus.

For example, Richard Branson is featured predominantly in the communications of the Virgin Group. His predominance as the main character in these narratives increases the likelihood that audiences' attention and positive emotional engagement will be focused on him, fostering individual celebrity. In contrast, Netflix's predominance as the main character in organizational communications increases the likelihood that audiences' attention and emotional engagement will be focused on the

organization, fostering organizational celebrity. Lastly, Apple’s communication about product launches often featured Steve Jobs and Apple as co-main characters, attracting attention and emotional responses at both loci. In sum, organizations can affect their locus of celebrity by predominantly adopting specific main characters in their narratives. Given their salience and accessibility, main characters attract and retain audiences’ attention and promote positive emotional perspective-taking at the same locus.

Proposition 1 (P1): Predominantly adopting the CEO, the organization, or both as the main characters in organizational narratives increases the likelihood that they will be the locus of celebrity.

Secondary characters. Although main characters are most prominent and at the centre of the narrative action, secondary characters contribute to main character development by offering insight, initiating change, and often acting as ‘catalysts for major events’ (Curran et al., 2024; Hastuti, 2023, p. 28). As such, secondary characters are usually understood based on their archetypical function in relationship to the main character, are not independent from them (Curran et al., 2024; Moin, 2020), and are described with less specific and distinctive traits. For our theorizing, we categorize secondary characters as either mirrors – that is, those characters that advance the narrative story by supporting the main character on their journey – or foils – that is, those characters that advance the narrative story by challenging the main character (Curran et al., 2024).

First, organizational communications may combine main and mirror characters. For example, IKEA’s website chronicles its history by combining the co-main characters Ingvar Kamprad and IKEA with ‘co-conspirators in the[ir] trade fair fight’ such as the upholstery factory Rune Rings.^[3] In the narrative, Rune Rings helps IKEA and its founder participate in trade shows they would have otherwise been banned from in order to grow market share. However, Rune Rings only serves a marginal agentic role in the narrated actions. Instead, both IKEA and Kamprad are portrayed as main characters, taking actions, experiencing challenges, and overcoming the competition.

We contend that organizations reduce the likelihood that celebrity will develop at the main characters’ locus when their communications predominantly combine main characters with a specific mirror character. While one piece of communication combining the main character with a specific mirror may not be enough to activate significant attention and emotional arousal towards the mirror character, when the main character is combined with a specific mirror in the majority of a firm’s narratives, the mirror’s supporting role facilitates a spillover of attention and emotionality from the main character to the mirror. This can reduce the likelihood celebrity will focus on the main character level.

On the one hand, when the same mirror characters appear in a majority of organizational communications, they become salient and socially significant to the audience via their association with the main character (Fiske and Taylor, 2013), facilitating an attention spillover effect. On the other hand, the supporting function of mirror characters facilitates

positive emotional spillover as the secondary character draws the audience to its congruent relationship with the main character (Curran et al., 2024).

Moreover, due to their supporting narrative function, mirrors are likely to affect how audiences attribute positive non-conformity and, consequently, the locus at which they will focus attention and positive emotional arousal. Specifically, when presented as repeatedly offering support to the main character, mirrors may reduce the likelihood that audiences will focus on the main character to develop attributions for the non-conforming actions at the centre of celebrity.

In sum, given the congruent relationship between the main and mirror characters, audience attention and positive emotional arousal for the main character are likely to spill over to the mirror. In turn, as mirrors inform audiences' attributions of positive non-conformity, they reduce the likelihood that celebrity will focus on the main character's locus.^[4]

Proposition 2a (P2a): Predominantly combining main characters with a mirror reduces the likelihood that the main characters will be the locus of celebrity.

Second, organizational communications may combine main characters and foils. For example, Sergio Marchionne portrayed Fiat as a foil he needed to reform: 'Fiat was a laughingstock. Whenever you opened a newspaper in Italy, there was another embarrassing story: Fiat had lost more money; its new car had flopped; a strike was on somewhere. [...] From day one, I recognized that Fiat had a leadership problem' (Marchionne, 2008).

In another example, IKEA's website chronicles its history by pitting the main characters Ingvar Kamprad and IKEA against its competitors (e.g., 'Ingvar Kamprad's experiment in selling furniture went well. So well, indeed, that the traditional furniture industry felt threatened by the rebel [...] But Ingvar and Ikea not only had problems at trade fairs. [...] the furniture retail association had started threatening suppliers: sell to Ikea, and we'll stop buying from you'^[5]). As demonstrated by these examples, a foil represents an antagonist and creates the challenges the main character needs to overcome (Lovelace et al., 2018). Thus, a foil serves a structural position that is not likely to attract positive emotional attention.

We contend that when organizational communications predominantly combine a main character with a specific foil, they strengthen the likelihood that celebrity will develop at the main character level. In this type of organizational narrative, the foil fosters the development of a compelling main character's arc (Weiland, 2016, p. 111). By being a catalyst for conflict, a foil increases the newsworthiness of the narrative (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006), facilitating attention, and is better suited to creating emotionally laden reactions towards winners and losers (Rindova et al., 2006), facilitating emotional arousal. Research shows a celebrity's competitor experiences an increase in audience attention but negative emotionality due to the adversary role played against the celebrity (Curran et al., 2024). We expect a similar effect when the majority of organizational communications depict a specific foil that the main character needs to reform or defeat. Thus, we theorize that when organizational communications predominantly combine main

characters with foils, they increase audience attention and positive emotional arousal at the main character's locus.

In sum, organizations can affect their locus of celebrity by predominantly combining a main character with a specific foil. The adversarial relationship between the main character and the foil generates a compelling character arc that will likely increase audience attention and emotional arousal for the main character. Although the adversarial position of the foil may facilitate attentional and emotional spillover from the main character to the foil, the emotionality will likely be negative, hindering the likelihood that the foil will achieve celebrity.

Proposition 2b (P2b): Predominantly combining main characters with a foil amplifies the likelihood that the main characters will be the locus of celebrity.

Next, we theorize how plot (another element of the narrative story) affects the locus of celebrity.

Plots. A *plot*, a series of logically and chronologically related events (Herman et al., 2005), is another central feature of the narrative story (Barthes, 2004; Bruner, 1990; Buchanan and Dawson, 2007; Pentland, 1999). Indeed, in its most basic form, a narrative requires 'an original state of affair, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affair' (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007; Czarniawska, 1998, p. 2).

Yet, actions themselves do not necessarily determine the plot; instead, organizations can select putative consequences (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007) to magnify audiences' perceptions of non-conformity. In other words, given that non-conformity is an essential feature of celebrity and has become a crucial ingredient in its canonical frame of reference (Boje, 1995; Hubbard et al., 2018; Pentland, 1999), organizations often use plots to highlight the consequences of their actions as positively non-conforming. For instance, narratives on a product launch may promote different plots depending on the magnitude of consequences they highlight, such as (1) an individual plot based on the launch effect on a founder's or CEO's life, (2) an organizational plot focusing on the launch's effect on the organization, or (3) an industry or societal plot focusing on its industry or societal effect.

We theorize that the predominance of specific plots in organizational communications affects how audiences attribute positive non-conformity and consequently, the locus at which they focus attention and positive emotional arousal. Audiences seeking to comprehend a plot use stated information to construct causal inferences (Johnson-Laird, 1983). In doing so, audiences balance their need for plausible narratives (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2008) with their need for dramatic tension (Bann and Bowl, 1973), creating a dialectic: Highly plausible narratives lack dramatic tension and are boring, but highly dramatic and defamiliarizing narratives, while exciting, lack plausibility and may be scrutinized and rejected (Barry and Elmes, 1997). We first discuss the two sides of the dialectic separately before combining them to culminate our theorizing.

On the one hand, audiences need plausible plots (Barry and Elmes, 1997). Thus, they make causal inferences via heuristics such as consequence-cause matching – that is, the assumption that for an explanation to be plausible, the magnitude of a cause should be akin to its consequences (Kelley and Michela, 1980; LeBoeuf and Norton, 2011; White, 2009). For example, individuals conclude that the same product failure (e.g., computer crash) is due to a larger cause (e.g., a widespread virus) when it is presented as having far-reaching consequences (e.g., job loss), and a smaller cause (e.g., cooling fan malfunction) when presented as having less significant consequences (LeBoeuf and Norton, 2011). In this way, consequence-cause matching acts as a ‘cue-to-causality’ (Einhorn and Hogarth, 1986, p. 6) by increasing audiences’ confidence in a more predictable world (Heider, 1958; LeBoeuf and Norton, 2011). Further, consequence-cause matching allows audiences to navigate the cognitive overload generated by organizations’ increased flow of information (Feather, 2013; White, 2009). Thus, organizations can directly affect how audiences construct causal meaning by varying the magnitude of consequences involved in their communications’ plots.

On the other hand, audiences need dramatic tension (Barry and Elmes, 1997). As such, while seeking to comprehend a plot, audiences build causal inferences that allow them to experience dramatic tension and suspense (Chatman, 1978; Rindova et al., 2006; Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006; Tobin, 2018). Dramatic tension is often built by increasing the stakes involved in the narrative and how difficult it is to achieve them (Szilas and Richle, 2013). If the selected causal inference renders an interpretation that is too low-stakes or simple to achieve, audiences cannot wonder if the consequences laid out in the plot will be achieved (Tobin, 2018) – they expect they will. Conversely, the uncertainty of pairing causal inferences with higher stakes and more complex consequences raises dramatic tension (Tobin, 2018), as audiences perceive the plot has less chance of succeeding. Given their need for dramatic tension, audiences construct plot-based causal attributions to experience some suspense. Thus, organizations can affect how audiences construct causal meaning by varying the magnitude of consequences involved in their plots.

Taken together, we theorize that organizations can affect the locus of celebrity by adopting specific plots in their narratives. Plots affect audiences’ causal inferences in attributing an organization’s positively evaluated non-conformity because audiences select causal inferences that best allow them to balance plausibility with the need for dramatic tension. By eliciting specific causal explanations, plots facilitate the accessibility of attributions at a specific locus (increasing audiences’ attention at the same locus) and evoke excitement and positive emotional arousal at the same locus.

Specifically, audiences select individual causal inferences when an organization uses individual plots (e.g., a plot based on a new product launch’s effect on the life of a *founder or CEO*). These attributions allow audiences to construct a causal understanding of the narrated events that is both plausible and emotionally arousing. Individual plots focus on personal achievement, often developing a character arc of positive change (Weiland, 2016). By selecting individual attributions to explain individual plots, audiences can evoke the broader cultural myth of the self-reliant, self-made person that can ‘avoid critical analysis by virtue of [its] repetition over time’ (Suddaby et al., 2023, p. 230). In this way, individual attributions allow audiences to build plausible yet emotionally resonant narrative interpretations.

Proposition 3a (P3a): Individual celebrity is more likely when organizational narratives predominantly adopt individual plots.

Further, we theorize that audiences can select individual and organizational causal inferences when organizations use organizational plots in their communications (e.g., a plot focusing a new product launch on the *organization*). Overall organizational level plots are more flexible than individual-level plots because they allow for the possibility of both individual and organizational attributions. Both attributions allow audiences to construct a causal understanding of the narrated events that is both plausible and emotionally arousing. Thus, in these situations, the configuration of plots with other narrative elements (e.g., main character and secondary character) becomes central to determining the locus of celebrity.^[6] For example, when Sergio Marchionne (main character) framed the launch of the New Fiat 500 as not ‘the launch of a car, but the launch of the Fiat group’^[7] (i.e., organizational plot), audiences were more likely to interpret the narrative by selecting individual causal explanations (his ability to turn around the Fiat Group, now FCA). Indeed, a focus on the individual provided a balanced explanation for organizational outcomes that was plausible – that is, appropriate in terms of consequence-cause matching – and has some dramatic tension – that is, it is an “emotionally satisfying” explanation (Meindl and Ehrlich, 1987, p. 92).

Proposition 3b (P3b): Individual and organizational celebrity are more likely when organizational narratives predominantly adopt organizational plots.

Lastly, we theorize audiences can make individual, organizational, and concurrent causal inferences when an organization uses plots highlighting industry or societal consequences (e.g., a plot focusing on a product launch’s effect on the *industry or society*). In these situations, audiences seek to explain an event with farther-reaching consequences via a plausible yet dramatic, emotionally arousing explanation. Matching industry or societal consequences with individual, organizational, or concurrent explanations allows audiences to make sense of the narrative through a plausible explanation that still offers an appropriate degree of dramatic tension. Although plausible contributors to industry or societal shifts, causal inferences focused exclusively on higher magnitude factors – for example, the collective action of industry competitors or demographic changes – would not offer enough dramatic tension. Overall, therefore, industry and societal level plots are the most flexible plots, allowing the possibility of individual, organizational, and concurrent celebrity to emerge. Once again, we contend that, when using this type of plot, its configuration with other narrative elements (e.g., main character and secondary character) becomes central to determining the locus of celebrity. For example, when Facebook communicates major product changes by highlighting the consequences on the industry and how people build social interactions, audiences are more likely to select individual, organizational, or concurrent causal explanations based on the overall configuration of narrative elements.^[8]

Proposition 3c (P3c): Individual, organizational, and concurrent celebrity are more likely when organizational narratives predominantly adopt industry or societal plots.

To this point, we have discussed the effects of characters and plots on celebrity locus. We next theorize how consistency across such elements of the narrative story may have important implications for these relationships.

Consistency between characters and plots. Corporate communication scholars agree on the value of consistent messaging (Johansen and Andersen, 2012). However, due to their collective nature, organizations may have multiple authors who produce different communication materials (Chreim, 2005). As such, organizational communications may lack consistency. Inconsistencies in characters or plots concerning the *same event* are especially likely to undermine the organization's ability to influence the locus of celebrity. For example, an organization may issue a press release about the launch of a new product that highlights the role of the R&D team (organizational main character) as well as the impact the product will have on the industry as a whole (industry plot). At the same time, the CEO may give an interview emphasizing their own personal role in the development of the product (individual main character) and how working on it has affected their lives (individual plot). Inconsistency in organizational communications about the same event cedes the power to shape the dominant interpretation, and thus the loci of celebrity, to the media and other constituents.

As communication efforts that avoid message fragmentation tend to be more effective (Heath, 1994; van Riel, 1997; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007), we theorize that the consistency across narrative story elements (i.e., promoting similar characters and plots through different communications about the same event) increases their effectiveness in determining celebrity locus. First, consistent narrative story elements may reduce audiences' reliance on effortful cognitive processing because the absence of competing alternatives reduces the need to select the best option (see Fiske and Taylor, 2013). In contrast, when audiences are exposed to inconsistent narrative story elements, they may become motivated to engage in more effortful cognitive processing that can reduce the overall ability of each narrative story element to affect the locus of celebrity.

Second, the availability of multiple communication materials providing corroborating and consistent narrative story elements fosters audiences' belief that the sources are trustworthy, increasing both message and source credibility (Druckman, 2001; Lupia, 2002; Olmos, 2015; Pennington and Hastie, 1992). In contrast, inconsistency in characters or plots promoted across different communications about the same event may reduce credibility by providing contradictory information to audiences. When organizations fail to speak with 'one voice' (Heath, 1994), such inconsistencies become salient and can undermine the effectiveness of their communication efforts.

In sum, by promoting more automatic cognitive processing and increasing message and source credibility, consistency in characters or plots across different organizational communications about the same event increases its effectiveness in determining celebrity locus.

Proposition 4 (P4): Predominantly adopting consistent characters and plots across different communications about the same event amplifies the positive relationship between these narrative story elements and the locus of celebrity.

Thus far, we have theorized that the narrative story – that is, *what* is told – can influence an organization's celebrity locus by predominantly adopting specific characters (P1, P2) and plots (P3), and by doing so consistently (P4). We next suggest that the narrative discourse – that is, *how* a story is told (Chatman, 1978) – has important implications for these relationships.

Narrative Discourse

Narrative discourse is the expression of the narrative story – that is, 'the means by which the content [characters and plot] is communicated' (Chatman, 1978, p. 19) – and it comprises both a *narrator* and a *narratee*. We suggest that a homodiegetic narrator (i.e., a narrator who is also a character in the narrative story) may influence how effectively a main character determines celebrity locus (P5). Similarly, we suggest that a second-person narratee (i.e., directly addressing audiences, making them part of the narrative story) may determine the effectiveness of characters (P6) and plots (P7) in affecting celebrity locus.

Narrators. A narrative perspective concerns how vantage points on the narrative stories are encoded in the narrative discourse and interpreted by audiences (Herman, 2009, p. 122). Ultimately, 'a narrative is something that someone tells'. As such, it encompasses a *narrator* – that is, the agent that tells the narrative (Genette, 1980; Hatch, 1996; Herman et al., 2005; Pentland, 1999, p. 712). Narrators can be homo- or heterodiegetic. A homodiegetic narrator is a character in the narrative story (Genette, 1980; Jesch and Stein, 2009; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). For example, 'We're delivering our largest selection of products at the fastest speed ever' (Amazon, 2023). In contrast, a heterodiegetic narrator is not a character in the narrative story (Genette, 1980; Jesch and Stein, 2009; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983) – for example, 'Utah Medical has introduced two new products [...] both of which are expected to be significant contributors to future earnings' (Utah-Medical, 1991). We theorize that using a homodiegetic main character narrator may increase the effects of the predominance of main characters on the locus of celebrity for three reasons.

First, a narrator serves as a narrative and linguistic cue that modulates audiences' attention and the perspective from which they cognitively process the narrative story elements (Brunyé et al., 2009; Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980). When the main character assumes the narrator role (homodiegetic), audiences pay more attention to it. In other words, by serving this dual function (main character and narrator), the main character appears more salient relative to other characters, commanding greater attention on the same locus (Fiske and Taylor, 2013).

Second, a homodiegetic main character narrator allows narratives to take an internal focalization *through* the main character's consciousness (Culler, 1980) – often using first-person pronouns – rather than an external focalization *on* the character (Culler, 1980) – often using third-person pronouns. An internal focalization via a homodiegetic main character narrator provides the audience with an inner view of the main character's mind, increasing the audience's ability to identify with and like the main character (Weiland, 2011). Experimental results show that readers exposed to a homodiegetic, internally focalized narrator are more likely to take the main

character–narrator's perspective (Creer et al., 2019), experience increased identification with it, and perceive it as more likable (Jumpertz and Tary, 2020).

Third, a homodiegetic main character-narrator with an internal focalization becomes a vehicle for emotionally laden messages in which the narrator can directly express the main character's 'values, attitudes, intimate feelings, and [...] moods' (Stern, 1991, p. 11). As such, these messages reflect the character's emotions directly. Thus, a main character narrator can strengthen the empathetic effect of the predominance of the main character on the audience's emotional response. With this type of narrator, audiences are more inspired to feel emotionally closer to the main character than to other characters (Stern, 1991). This perception of closeness fosters an emotional relationship between audiences and the main character (Horton and Wohl, 1956) and amplifies the main character's effect in influencing the locus of celebrity.

While we suggest that the amplification effects of homodiegetic narrators should work similarly for both individual (P1a) and organizational main character narrators (P1b), the effect may still be positive but smaller when two main characters share the narrative spotlight (P1c). Using two homodiegetic narrators with an internal focalization effectively creates a variable focalization such that the point of view from which the narrative is told changes throughout it (Genette, 1980). In these situations, the strengthening effect of the homodiegetic main character narrators may be smaller because it presses the audience to stretch their attention and emotional connection across different main characters (Weiland, 2011).

Proposition 5a (P5a): Predominantly adopting a single homodiegetic main character narrator in organizational narratives amplifies the likelihood that the main character will be the locus of celebrity.

Proposition 5b (P5b): Predominantly adopting homodiegetic co-main characters' narrators in organizational narratives amplifies the relationship between co-main characters and concurrent celebrity, but to a lesser degree than for a single homodiegetic main character narrator.

Narratees. A *narratee* is the agent to whom the narrator tells the narrative (Herman et al., 2005), which can be told either in the second- or third-person voice. A second-person narratee brings audiences into the narrative by addressing them directly and identifying them as beneficiaries of the narrative story. For example, in a recent Apple product launch event, the most frequently used word on stage was 'you' (over 230 mentions in 1 h).^[9] A third-person narratee, instead, signals that audiences are external to the narrative story – for example, 'our commitment to building more powerful connections between Rhapsody and *its customers* so we can better [...] meet *their needs*' (Rhapsody, 2019). Given a second-person narratee's power in bringing audiences into the narrative story using 'you', we suggest that its predominance in organizational communications may strengthen the previously formalized relationships.

First, by inviting the audience into the narrative, a second-person narratee may amplify the relationship between characters and celebrity locus. A second-person narratee

breaks the fourth wall that separates characters from audiences (Sorlin, 2015). This choice transports audiences into the narrative story experienced by the characters (Gerrig, 1993; Green and Brock, 2000, 2002) and assigns them a character-like status (Sorlin, 2015), thus reducing the distance between the audience and the characters (Chatman, 1978). This proximity strengthens the characters' motivational relevance, increasing the attention audiences will pay to them (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). Moreover, by more personally involving the audience in the narrative story, a second-person narratee may facilitate greater empathy, emotional engagement, and identification with the characters, enhancing the effect of the predominance of specific characters on celebrity locus.

Proposition 6 (P6): Predominantly adopting second-person narratees in organizational narratives amplifies the likelihood that the main characters will be the locus of celebrity.

Second, by strengthening the use of consequence-cause matching and the need for some dramatic content, a second-person narratee may amplify the relationship between specific plots and celebrity locus. As the plot becomes personally relevant, audiences engage more emotionally with it (Fludernik, 1994). Since emotional stimuli increase the speed of audiences' cognitive reactions (Kissler et al., 2007), a second-person narratee can promote audiences' reliance on consequence-cause matching when selecting causal information to interpret the narrative (Levine and Edelstein, 2009). Moreover, audience transport into the narrative is more enjoyable if it entails tension and suspense (Green et al., 2004). Thus, a second-person narratee that brings audiences into the narrative can strengthen audience preference for maintaining dramatic tension by selecting suspense-producing causal explanations. By simultaneously strengthening audiences' use of consequence-cause matching to build plausibility and preference for dramatic tension, using a second-person narratee may amplify the relationship between a plot and celebrity locus.

Proposition 7 (P7): Predominantly adopting second-person narratees in organizational narratives amplifies the likelihood that the plot will affect the locus of celebrity.

NARRATIVE CONFIGURATIONS

In our final section, we leverage our theorizing to highlight some configurations of narrative elements that may be particularly effective at facilitating celebrity at the (1) individual, (2) organizational, and (3) concurrent loci (see Table I).

Individual Celebrity

Individual celebrity is facilitated by organizational communications predominantly adopting an individual main character combined with an organizational foil in an organizational level plot. These narrative story elements create a compelling main

Table I. Examples of narrative configurations

| | <i>Individual celebrity</i> | <i>Organizational celebrity</i> | <i>Concurrent celebrity</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Main C. | Individual | Organizational | Individual and organizational |
| Secondary C. | None or organization as foil | None or external foil | None or external foil |
| Plot | Organizational | Organizational | Industry and societal |
| Narrator | Homodiegetic (main character) | Homodiegetic (main character) | Homodiegetic (main characters) |
| Narratee | Second person | Second person | Second person |
| Example | Sergio Marchionne (FCA) | Netflix | SpaceX & Elon Musk |
| Organizational narrative excerpts | <i>Four years ago, Fiat was a laughingstock. [...] Imagine showing up in June 2004 and being the fifth guy to try to resuscitate what appeared to most people to be a cadaver. And just imagine what top management thought. [...] I could see it written all over their faces</i> | <i>In 1998, we delivered our first DVD. This morning, we shipped our last. For 25 years, we redefined how people watched films and series at home, [...]. Today, we wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for watching</i> | <i>You want to wake up in the morning and think the future is going to be great and I can't think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars. – Elon Musk [...] SpaceX believes a fully and rapidly reusable rocket is the pivotal breakthrough needed [...]. The majority of the launch cost comes from building the rocket, which historically has flown only once. Compare that to a commercial airliner</i> |

character's arc, often resembling what Lovelace and colleagues designated as transformer or saviour archetypes (2018) in which the individual must reform the organization. As a catalyst for conflict, the organizational foil increases the newsworthiness of the narrative (Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006) and creates more emotionally laden, positive reactions towards the individual main character. When these narratives also adopt a homodiegetic main character narrator and a second-person narratee, we expect the relationship between these narrative story elements and individual celebrity to be stronger.

Organizational Celebrity

Organizational communications predominantly adopting an organizational main character in a plot at the organizational level facilitate organizational celebrity. Given their salience and accessibility, organizational main characters attract and retain audiences' attention and promote positive emotional perspective-taking at the same locus. When these narratives feature organizational level plots, audiences will adopt organizational attributions to interpret the narrated events in a way that is both plausible and emotionally arousing. The use of a foil, a homodiegetic organizational main character narrator, and a second-person narratee will also strengthen the relationships between the narrative story elements and organizational celebrity.

Concurrent Celebrity

Concurrent celebrity is often facilitated by organizational communications combining organizational and individual main characters in a plot at the industry or societal level. By portraying both the individual and the organization as main characters, such narratives increase the salience and accessibility of these social actors, attracting and retaining audiences' attention and promoting a positive emotional perspective-taking at the same loci. With these main characters, industry and societal plots push audiences to adopt concurrent attributions to construct a causal understanding of the narrated events that is both plausible and highly emotionally arousing. Furthermore, if these narratives feature a foil, a homodiegetic dual main character narrator, and a second-person narratee, the relationship between these narrative elements and concurrent celebrities will be stronger.

DISCUSSION

Building on prior research (see Lovelace et al., 2022; Pfarrer et al., 2010; Pollock et al., 2023; Rindova et al., 2006), we advanced theory on how organizations affect their celebrity locus in three primary ways. First, we developed a more complete theory on the narrative antecedents of the locus of celebrity. Current theory has focused on how some CEOs (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2022) or some organizations (e.g., Zavyalova et al., 2017) become celebrities. Yet, these streams of research do not directly address why celebrity resides at the individual or organizational locus. We addressed this limitation and enhanced understanding of the antecedents of celebrity locus. This is important as research on celebrity and related constructs suggests that while organizational celebrity can positively affect organizational performance (Hubbard et al., 2018; Pfarrer et al., 2010), individual celebrity may be detrimental (Lovelace et al., 2018; Wade et al., 2006).

Second, we provided theoretical insights into how organizations can use narrative elements in their communications to affect their locus of celebrity. Current theory has focused on the role of media narratives in pulling social actors into the limelight (e.g., Hayward et al., 2004; Lovelace et al., 2018; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017) and the role of CEOs (Lovelace et al., 2022) and organizations (see Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017) in pushing themselves into the limelight. We augmented current theory by explaining how organizations can use narrative elements to affect the locus of their celebrity. Organizational communications are often echoed in media coverage (Cameron et al., 1997), and in the current social media landscape, they are directly accessible to audiences (Wang et al., 2021). Thus, by diving deeper into the role of organizational communications, our work meaningfully enhances celebrity theory.

Third, by developing a framework for individual, organizational, and concurrent celebrity, we offered a more refined theory of the distinctive antecedents of different celebrity loci. Our direct focus on concurrent celebrity allowed us to address an important phenomenon currently overlooked – namely, situations in which organizations and individuals both have celebrity, such as Tesla and Elon Musk and Amazon and Jeff Bezos. Examining the co-occurrence of individual and organizational celebrity can advance our

understanding of how different celebrity loci develop, how they can be managed, and how they affect organizational outcomes. Overall, our theory opens the door for interesting future research directions, which we discuss next.

Implications for Future Research

First, given our focus on understanding the locus of celebrity, our theory centred on a subset of constituents that positively evaluate a social actor's behaviour. However, research has theorized that individuals and firms can simultaneously generate celebrity and infamy (Pollock et al., 2016; Zavyalova et al., 2017). Future research is needed to theoretically untangle how celebrity and infamy can co-occur at different loci and empirically investigate how organizational communications may affect the locus of infamy evaluations.

Second, given our interest in how organizations can influence the locus of celebrity via their communication with audiences, we attempted to keep the event 'constant' and theoretically isolate the effects of firms' narratives. Given the reciprocal nature of firm actions and stakeholder evaluations (Zavyalova et al., 2017), examining organizational communications about multiple events over time could further our understanding of celebrity formation and its maintenance across loci.

Third, our theory focused on 'narratives as objectified social facts' and paid less attention to the context in which the stories are performed (Boje, 1991). Yet, elements of the situated narrative performance may be important in managing celebrity locus. Thus, research investigating the role of performative narrative elements may generate important insights into celebrity formation. For example, Apple product launches are highly performative events where location, visual elements, sounds, and music are curated to enhance audience experiences. Relatedly, examining elements of the natural linguistic context, such as 'how the story is introduced into [an] ongoing interaction, how listeners react to the story, and how the story affects subsequent dialogue' (Boje, 1991, p. 107) could offer important insights. By investigating celebrity narratives as storytelling acts that involve audience interactions (Boje, 1991), researchers could shed light on the negotiating processes underlying celebrity development.

Fourth, although our theory underscored how organizations can use different narrative elements to affect the locus of their celebrity, such decisions may blend in or stand out depending on the context. For example, using a second-person narratee may be rare in press releases, increasing its effect relative to its use in social media. A related question concerns the varying impact that narratives developed at different hierarchical levels have on audience interpretations (Balogun et al., 2014; Brown, 2006) and an organization's ability to manage its celebrity. For example, while narratives emanating directly from executives (such as autobiographies or social media posts) may generate greater emotional responses than impersonal organizational communications and receive attention more quickly than narratives developed by line employees, when such narratives do attract attention, they could be perceived as more genuine and trustworthy, with a greater impact on audience interpretations.

Lastly, the introduction of concurrent celebrity opens multiple avenues for future research. For instance, concurrent celebrity may alter some of the sociocognitive

effects attributed to individual celebrity, such as an increased sense of power, confidence, and authority (Lovelace et al., 2018; Pollock et al., 2023). Perhaps these effects are stronger when a celebrity individual leads a non-celebrity organization (and weaker in the case of concurrent celebrity) because of the imbalance in bargaining power that this creates.

Also, the attainment, durability, and breadth of concurrent celebrity may differ from those of individual and organizational celebrity. For example, concurrent celebrity may last longer and be more intense, given the need for multiple characters and plots to create the dramatized reality at the core of its development. Conversely, concurrent celebrity may lead to the co-occurrence of infamy (Zavyalova et al., 2017) due to the heightened attention and emotional responses for both the CEO and the organization (e.g., Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook).

Studying the Locus of Celebrity Empirically

Overall, future empirical research could reveal critical insights into celebrity development, value, and management across loci. The challenge will be to disentangle individual and organizational celebrity empirically. To do so, researchers could leverage computer-aided content analysis to code media data for the relative prominence of individuals or their organizations (see D'Oria, 2017). Researchers could investigate how frequently social actors are mentioned in media coverage and their relative positions within the text. For example, being mentioned in an article's title and leading paragraph denotes higher attention placed on that social actor (Lovelace et al., 2022). Also, as artificial intelligence advances (von Krogh et al., 2023), researchers could leverage it to identify the locus of media attention.

Operationalizing celebrity at multiple loci using consistent measures would also benefit research on the consequences of celebrity. For example, our theory builds on celebrity and related streams of research to identify potential differences in the outcomes of celebrity based on its locus (e.g., Wade et al., 2006). This related research is relevant to our theorizing because it develops theory on 'the effects of positive attention and acclaim, the core elements of celebrity' (Lovelace et al., 2018, p. 421). Nevertheless, future studies on the performance implications of different loci of celebrity (including concurrent) utilizing more appropriate measurements are needed to understand whether and to what extent the value of this social approval asset is conditional on its locus.

CONCLUSION

Celebrity is an important social evaluation with critical implications for constituents' perceptions and organizational outcomes. Yet, how it comes to reside at a specific locus (i.e., the individual leader, the organization, or both) has not been well theorized. We addressed this limitation by explicating how organizational communications help determine the locus of celebrity. A key implication of our theorizing is that organizations are not passive observers in celebrity development. Instead, their narratives affect how celebrity becomes all about 'me' or 'us'.

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NOTES

- [1] Prior management research has adopted other approaches to the study of organizational narratives such as the Burkean pentad (e.g., Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018), interpretivist (e.g., Barry and Elmes, 1997), social constructivism (Czarniawska, 1998; Sonenshein, 2010), antenarratives (Boje, 2001), rhetoric (König et al., 2018) among others. In this manuscript, we follow Aristotelian and structuralist traditions to highlight the distinction between narrative story and narrative discourse (Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980) as they both have important implications for audiences' sense-making. Moreover, we leverage the rich tradition of research on the narrative-mind nexus (that looks at narrative world-making) to connect narrative features to their influences on audiences' sense-making (e.g., Gerrig, 1993; Herman, 2012).
- [2] Given our focus on how organizations can affect the locus of celebrity via their communication to audiences, we keep the event constant. This allows us to theoretically isolate the effects of organizational communication on the locus of celebrity and avoid conflating it with the effects of different events.
- [3] <https://ikeamuseum.com/en/explore/the-story-of-ikea/price-wars/>.
- [4] We recognize that a mirror that is a celebrity in their own right might change the nature of this relationship due to endorsement effects (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016; Dalpiaz et al., 2014; Knoll and Matthes, 2017). However, given the well-established nature of celebrity endorsement, our theorizing focuses on non-celebrity mirrors.
- [5] <https://ikeamuseum.com/en/explore/the-story-of-ikea/price-wars/>.
- [6] We discuss this in more detail in the Narrative Configurations section.
- [7] <https://www.theledger.com/story/news/2007/07/08/flat-hopes-its-new-500-will-put-the-romance-back-in-driving/25838703007/>.
- [8] We discuss this in more detail in the Narrative Configurations section.
- [9] <https://brandminds.com/behind-apple-product-launch-event-storytelling-strategy/>.

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APPENDIX A

HOW CELEBRITY DIFFERS FROM OTHER SOCIAL EVALUATIONS

Research on social evaluations has made significant progress in clarifying the differences between several social evaluations. For more details on this area of research, we refer the interested reader to the work of Bitektine (2011); Pollock et al. (2019); Rindova et al. (2006); and Zavvalova et al. (2017). In this appendix, we draw from this work to summarize the main differences between celebrity and other social evaluations, such as legitimacy, reputation, status, and infamy. Indeed, although celebrity, like these other social evaluations, affects stakeholders' willingness to exchange resources with an organization (Pfarrer et al., 2010; Rindova et al., 2006), it differs in its (1) theoretical foundations; (2) sociocognitive content; (3) stability; (4) development process; and (5) the mechanisms that drive its positive outcomes. The operationalization of these constructs should reflect such differences, but not always does (see Table II).

Celebrity is defined as high public attention and positive emotional responses from audiences, and its theoretical foundations can be found in the sociology of mass media (Rindova et al., 2006). Its primary sociocognitive content (i.e., the audiences' cognitive appraisals and expectations that shape the nature and effects of the social evaluation) is emotional (Pollock et al., 2019). Since emotional evaluations tend to occur instantaneously (Agarwal and Malhotra, 2005; Pollock et al., 2019; Slovic et al., 2005) and are more difficult to sustain over time (Pollock et al., 2019), celebrity is theorized to be more transitory than other social approval assets (e.g., Zavvalova et al., 2017). Its development has been linked to the media creation of dramatized realities that highlight a social actor's non-conforming actions and characteristics (Hayward et al., 2004; Rindova et al., 2006). Celebrity's effects on a social actor's exchange relationships and opportunities are driven by high arousal and perceived attractiveness that dominate decision-making (Pollock et al., 2019). Given the central role of the media in attracting celebrity, this construct has been measured via the volume and tenor of media coverage as either a dichotomous (e.g., Pfarrer et al., 2010) or an ordinal construct (e.g., Lovelace et al., 2022). Other scholars have measured celebrity (or stardom) using media-based certification contests (e.g., Graffin et al., 2008; Malmendier and Tate, 2009; Wade et al., 2008). However, these measures seem to be better operationalizations for status, as they do not reflect the emotional component of celebrity (Pollock et al., 2019).

Legitimacy, defined as a judgment of fit with normative values and beliefs (Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995), has its theoretical roots in institutional theory (Rindova et al., 2006). Its primary sociocognitive content is based on moral, pragmatic, or cognitive evaluations (Suchman, 1995) of alignment with a social group's central values and beliefs. As such, legitimacy is more stable than celebrity and less subject to change (Suchman, 1995), and its development has been linked to external validation processes via conformity and social ties (Rindova et al., 2006). For example, legitimacy can be attained via conformity with established norms (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) and ties to legitimate social actors (Baum and Oliver, 1991). Acceptance tends to drive the positive effects of legitimacy on a social actor's ability to gain access to resources (Suchman, 1995). Researchers have used several approaches to measure legitimacy, including (i) the tone of media

Table II. Comparison of celebrity to other social evaluations

| | <i>Celebrity</i> | <i>Legitimacy</i> | <i>Reputation</i> | <i>Status</i> | <i>Infamy</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| Definition | High attention and positive emotional responses from audiences (Rindova et al., 2006) | Judgment of fit with normative values and beliefs (Bitektine, 2011) | Perceived ability to create value (Rindova et al., 2005) | Relative standing in a social order (Washington and Zajac, 2005) | High attention and negative emotional responses (Pollock et al., 2016) |
| Theoretical foundations | Sociology of mass media | Institutional theory | Signalling theory | Network theory | Sociology of deviance |
| Sociocognitive content | Primarily emotional | Moral, pragmatic, or cognitive | Primarily rational | Primarily rational and moral | Primarily emotional and moral |
| Stability | Transitory | Stable | Moderately stable | Stable | Moderately transitory |
| Development process | Creation of media dramatized realities | External validation via conformity and social ties | Social actor behaviours and outcomes that serve as signals | Pattern of affiliations | Low conformity to societal and constituents' norms |
| Mechanisms driving outcomes | Arousal and attractiveness | Acceptance and endorsement | Reduced Uncertainty | Deference | Arousal and disapproval |
| Measurement | Media volume and tenor | Media tone; links with regulatory bodies; adoption of codes of conduct | Surveys, media rankings, quality ratings, performance data | Network-based measures; affiliation-based measures; awards, nominations and certifications | Negative media portrayals |

reports (e.g., Deephouse, 1996; Pollock and Rindova, 2003); (ii) links with regulatory bodies (Baum and Oliver, 1991; Rao, 1994; Singh et al., 1986); and (iii) adoption of codes of conduct (e.g., Bansal and Hunter, 2003; Stevens et al., 2005).

Reputation consists of the perceived ability of a social actor to create value (Rindova et al., 2005) and captures 'the idea that actors rely on observable attributes or a history or past actions to form expectations about future actions and performance' (Pollock et al., 2019, p. 450). As such, the theoretical foundations of reputation can be found in signalling theory (Rindova et al., 2006). The primary sociocognitive content of reputation is a rational evaluation (Pollock et al., 2019) that involves analytical information processing (Slovic et al., 2005) aimed at assessing the capabilities and worth of a social actor (Pollock et al., 2019). Thus, reputation tends to be less transitory than celebrity (based on fleeting emotional arousal) yet less stable than legitimacy (based on stable moral evaluations). Its development process has often been conceptualized as a signalling process in which a social actor's behaviours and outcomes serve as a signal that forms its reputation (Rindova et al., 2006). Reducing uncertainty drives the positive effects of reputation on a social actor's exchange relationships and opportunities (Rindova et al., 2006). Reputation has been measured via (i) published

rankings (e.g., Basdeo et al., 2006; Haleblan et al., 2017); (ii) media coverage (e.g., Deephouse, 2000); (iii) product quality rankings (e.g., Benjamin and Podolny, 1999); (iv) archival composite data (e.g., Hallen and Pahnke, 2016); and (v) surveys (e.g., Deephouse and Jaskiewicz, 2013).

Status, defined as the relative standing in a social order (Sauder et al., 2012), finds its theoretical roots in network theory (Rindova et al., 2006). Its primary sociocognitive content is both rational and moral (Pollock et al., 2019), and to this extent, status tends to be relatively stable over time. It develops from observing a social actor's pattern of affiliation with other prominent actors (Podolny, 1994), and deference based on status positions tends to drive the positive outcomes of this social evaluation. Status has been measured using: (i) network-based measures such as Bonacich's eigenvector centrality (e.g., Podolny, 1994); (ii) affiliation-based measures (e.g., Hubbard et al., 2018); and (iii) awards, nominations, and certifications (e.g., Ertug and Castellucci, 2013; Shi et al., 2017).

Infamy, defined as high attention and negative emotional responses (Pollock et al., 2016), has recently attracted researchers' attention (Pollock et al., 2019; Rindova et al., 2006; Zavyalova et al., 2017, 2018). Its theoretical foundations are arguably still under development but can be found in the sociology of deviance (see Pollock et al., 2016). The primary sociocognitive content of infamy is emotional, although moral evaluations also play a role, and it is relatively transitory (Pollock et al., 2016, 2019). Infamy develops from a social actor engaging in behaviours that do not conform or are otherwise incongruent with the values and norms held by a constituent group or society (Pollock et al., 2016; Zavyalova et al., 2017). As researchers have only recently begun to define infamy as a construct of interest, there are no established norms for its operationalization. Given its conceptualization as the negative analogue to celebrity, media data on negative portrayals of social actors (e.g., Gunther and Grandy, 2009) could be a valid option for measuring infamy.