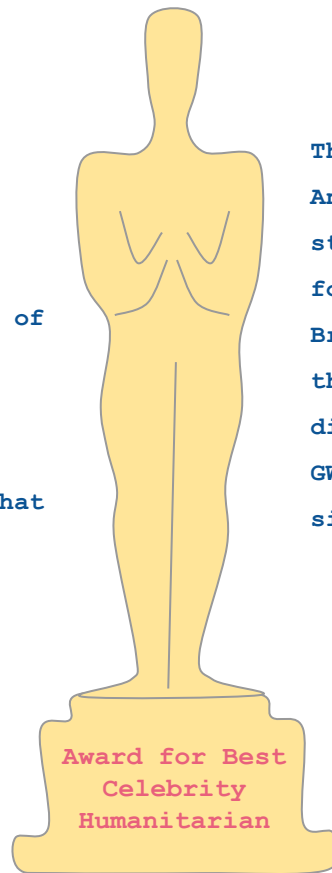
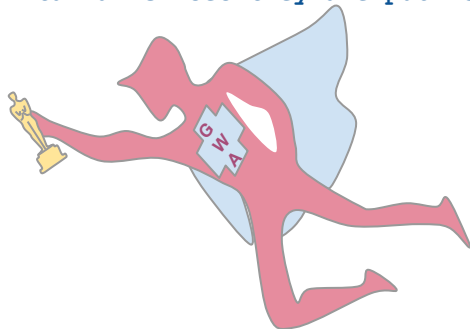


Celebrity Goodwill Ambassadors: Their best role?

What is the impact of the institution of the UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador on the perception of humanitarian issues?

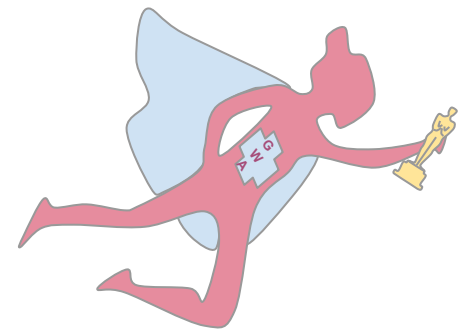
Introduction

The number of celebrity humanitarians has been growing steadily over the last 30 years. UNICEF has used celebrity Goodwill Ambassadors (GWAs) since 1954 to spread their message and create public awareness of humanitarian crises (Yoo and Jin, 2013). However, their impact may not be wholly positive. Now that the United Nations has over 400 celebrity GWAs it is essential that we know the impact they have on the humanitarian crises they are publicising.



Method

This research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a postcolonial lens to study the language of two celebrity GWAs for UNICEF. Audrey Hepburn and Millie Bobby Brown were selected due to the similarities in the gender and profession, as well as their difference in age and the period they became GWAs. In addition, both have taken part in similar interviews and speeches.



Findings

This research has found five common themes in GWA language

1. GWAs as agents themselves:

GWAs were presented as heroes who have completed extraordinary tasks. In doing so they are in danger of taking away the agency from the children and young people they represent.

2. The reduced and stereotyped 'other':

GWAs also contribute to a discourse that 'others' the so-called Third World, in a reduced and simplified stereotype of 'sufferers'. Hepburn and Brown use language that renders recipients of UNICEF projects to be objects that need help from the West.

3. Detachment:

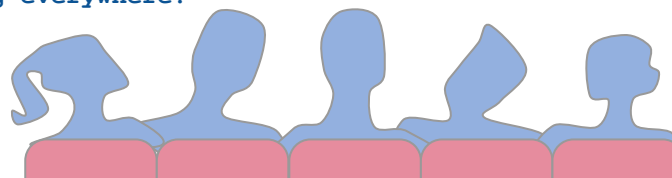
The 'sufferers' are not only homogenised but also distanced geographically and psychologically. For example, Hepburn refers to poverty existing across two continents, despite it existing everywhere.

4. Infallible UNICEF:

Despite past failures of UNICEF and questions of legitimacy over international intervention or areas it could improve, GWAs ignore these issues and present the institution in an unproblematic manner.

5. Normalisation:

These themes combine to normalise humanitarian crises in the Global South and present crises as natural or typical for this part of the world. In the 'Third World' suffering is the norm and a natural part of life. Furthermore, as well as normalising the role of the Third World as sufferers, the West becomes normalised as saviours.



Conclusion

It is possible to argue that when GWAs perpetuate these themes they remove the necessity for Western audiences to act. Audiences may believe they are doing enough by donating rather than attempting to change structural processes that have led to a humanitarian crisis. Instead, their speech makes a crisis apolitical. In order to combat the effects of these themes, it is necessary to remove this understanding of the global South and the 'sufferers'. Instead, celebrities should help to rupture perceptions Westerners have...

References

Yoo, J and Jin, Y (2013). "Effects of celebrity-organization congruence on audience attitudes, preferences, and credibility ratings for goodwill ambassadors" *Asian Journal of Communication* Vol. 23:6, pp. 620-636.

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