

## **Puppets of Necessity? Celebritisation in Structured Reality Television**

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### **Abstract**

This conceptual paper uses field theory, and a production of culture perspective to explore the celebritisation process in structured reality television. This relatively new genre, typified by *The Only Way Is Essex*, blends fiction with fact, and constitutes a new, playful and interactive iteration of the broader category of reality television. We identify three culturally productive models that create new celebrity discourses and establish a theoretical underpinning for the role of structured reality in the celebritisation process; tournaments of value, spectacle and transformative performances. Whilst not exclusive to structured reality television, these models are particularly effective at explaining how celebrities are interactively understood in an increasingly mediatised marketplace. We contribute a model which proposes that celebritisation in structured reality is a homologising process through which celebrity meaning is legitimised.

### **Summary statement of contribution**

We highlight how structured reality programming resembles the culturally productive forces associated with tournament rituals, transformative performances and theories of spectacle that help marketing scholars unpack the cultural codes deployed in the celebritisation process. In doing so, we contribute to existing marketing scholarship by arguing that the celebritisation process acts as both an empirical context and a conceptual frame that highlights the relationship between cultural meanings, aesthetic practices and marketplace forms.

**Keywords:** Consumer Culture, Celebritisation, Production of Culture, Structured Reality

## Introduction

Television is a universe where you get the impression that social actors – even when they appear to be important, free, and independent, and even sometimes possessed of an extraordinary aura (just take a look at the television magazines) – are the puppets of a necessity that we must understand, of a structure that we must unearth and bring to light (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 38).

There is some agreement amongst contemporary scholars of celebrity that modes of celebrity production, particularly those that evolve within the medium of television, are increasingly characterised by commodification, diversification and democratisation (Driessens, 2013; Kerrigan, Brownlie, Hewer & Daza-LeTouze, 2011; Stringfellow, MacLaren, Maclean & O’Gorman, 2013). Given such dynamics, research attention has turned in recent years to the emergence of manufactured celebrities or ‘celetoids’ (Rojek, 2001), whose fame is neither ascribed nor earned, but rather results from marketing efforts, planned production and intense media attention. In this paper, we shed further light on our theoretical understanding of the process of ‘celebritisation’ (Driessens, 2013) by examining the sub-field of structured reality television programmes, in particular the cultural production of celebrities within this genre, and the structural function such ‘puppets of necessity’ may play in marketplace interactions and meaning-making.

Grant McCracken’s influential work on the structure and movement of cultural meaning within the marketplace, helped to orientate scholars to the role that marketers play in mediating and helping consumers to negotiate marketplace meaning-making. In this role, marketers act as cultural intermediaries that help consumers interpret cultural meaning and negotiate identity transitions in an increasingly complex ‘consumer society’ (McCracken, 1988, p. 71). Based upon McCracken’s work, we have seen the emergence of a coherent discipline of marketing scholarship that has helped us to better understand the role that marketers play in mediating an array of marketplace interactions in diverse consumption contexts (Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk, Sherry Jr., & Wallendorf, 1988; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Schau, Gilly & Gilly, 2003). In the context of celebrity studies, McCracken’s meaning transfer model has become a foundational work in illuminating the dynamics between culture, marketplace forms, celebrity, and fans. This

genre of literature has largely been dedicated to celebrity endorsement and marketing communications (Carroll, 2009; Erdogan, 1999; Hsu & McDonald, 2002; McCracken, 1989; Ritson & Elliot, 1999), consumer identity projects and their relationship to celebrity forms (Banister & Cocker, 2013; Fournier, 1998; Hamilton & Hewer, 2010; Thomson, 2006; Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2012), return on investment, brand equity effects and congruence (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; Fleck & Quester, 2007; Pringle & Binet, 2005; Seno & Lukas, 2007), and celebrity credibility scales (Pornpitakpan, 2003).

Whilst this literature lays an important foundation as regards to how marketplace meaning is interpreted, mediated and negotiated, the role that mass media vehicles such as television play in processes of cultural appropriation and the symbolic manufacture of new celebrity forms is far less clear. In this paper, we are interested in capturing insights to the process of celebritisation as a feature of contemporary marketing activity that draws upon consumers' desire for television as 'cultural fast food' (Bourdieu, 1998). We define celebritisation as a process through which culturally productive agents (marketers, directors, producers, and other agents), vested in manufacturing particular types of celebrity, leverage institutional norms and industry practices, which give rise to 'commodified and merchandized' (Lewis, 2010, p. 580) forms. Thus, we see celebritisation at a 'social fields level... as a long term-structural development' (Driessens, 2013, p. 643) that occurs at a macro-level. We seek to contribute to scholarship that unpacks the cultural logics associated with celebritisation as a mode of production (Kerrigan et al., 2011). We are not so much interested in the construction of a single celebrity, *per se*, but rather how the structured reality genre itself operates as a field that is able to create and perpetuate various celebrity forms. In doing so, we highlight the role that marketing, understood as a cultural process that links consumer actions with the marketplace, plays within a field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993).

Our focus is on the relatively recent phenomenon of 'structured' reality television, which is a format that employs everyday people in preference to branded celebrities and blends authentic experiences within highly structured pseudo-environments, blurring the 'boundaries between real life and entertainment' (Rose & Wood, 2005, p. 286). There have been countless examples

in recent years, including *Jersey Shore*, *The Only Way is Essex* (hereafter *TOWIE*), and *Made in Chelsea* (hereafter *MIC*) coming to represent a booming television genre that sees specific groups of people, united by a socio-economic context or geography, apparently followed in their day-to-day lives by a documentary-style film crew. The format is a blend of ‘fictional storytelling with reality TV’ (Woods, 2014, p. 198), where the production team stage or reenact everyday encounters and experiences, and prompt dialogue and interactions that often centre on the romantic relationships of cast members.

Similar to other commodified systems (Cashmore & Parker, 2003; Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Peñaloza, 2000), we argue that structured reality programming provides unique insights into the celebritisation process. We posit that television remains to be a powerful, ubiquitous force of consumer socialisation and thus highly relevant for understanding the contemporary marketing landscape. Researchers have begun to capture and conceptualise the role of television in constructing reality and authenticity, and capturing emotional value (Bonsu, Darmody, & Parmentier, 2010; Hearn, 2008; O’Guinn & Shrum, 1997). Our conceptual paper draws upon this rich, emerging body of research and focuses on the relatively underexplored format of ‘structured reality’. In order to give rich, contextual examples in our analysis, we both draw upon the authors’ combined knowledge of this genre, as well as gathering perspectives offered in a range of online and offline media.

We highlight how structured reality can be viewed through three theoretical perspectives: tournaments of value, which are cultural practices that establish status and taste; transformative performances, where industry conventions of the body and gender are leveraged; and forms of spectacle, which enable new celebrity forms to lay claim to existing celebrity archetypes. While there are existing theoretical perspectives associated with celebrity status and celebritisation (see Rojek, 2001; Driessens, 2013), we propose that ‘structured’ reality stars are worthy of attention and can provide valuable insights in conceptualising the production of a celebrity system. Celebrity meaning can be strengthened via the structured reality format, by drawing on a unique set of meta-processes that underpin celebritisation (Driessens, 2013). By proposing a new conceptual framework in the celebritisation process, we

hope to sensitise marketing scholars to the role that fields (Bourdieu, 1977) play in creating celebrity culture. The importance of this research is to demonstrate how structured reality acts as a legitimised field of meaning production in the celebritisation process.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. We begin with a succinct overview of literature pertaining to celebrity and its dynamics, and research exploring the role of the celebrity product within contemporary marketplace interactions. We then introduce the production of culture perspective and its relationship to marketing, before outlining Bourdieu's notion of fields, which we argue can capture the collective nature of processes within celebritisation. We then draw from three core literatures to help demonstrate the culturally productive forces leveraged in the celebritisation process of structured reality which include treatments of tournaments of value, transformative performances and spectacle. The integration of these literatures with supporting examples from structured reality shows, helps us to understand the structural forces at work in the creation and propagation of structured reality as a field of meaning generation and its relationship to the celebritisation process. We conclude with a discussion of these categories and their implication for our understanding of the production and consumption of contemporary celebrity.

### **Conceptualising Celebrity within Structured Reality Television**

Brownlie and Hewer (2011) write that contemporary consumer culture is replete with manufactured celebrity product, serving as packaged resources for consumers to draw from in their identity projects. Despite this, there is a relative dearth of marketing-related literature that goes beyond McCracken's transfer model and explores the contextually nuanced production of celebrity forms in emergent fields. Rather than simply reflecting changing media tastes and fashion, developments in how celebrity is produced and constituted in new media formats such as reality TV is seen as having wider implications for understanding the relations between media and culture, and the construction of cultural identities (Turner, 2006). Such formats increasingly serve as platforms for need creation and social identification, which makes them highly valuable as marketing resources. Cultural perspectives on marketing have been particularly interested in understanding the wider resonance of new formats such as reality

television for understanding new consumption phenomena and marketing priorities within the context of ever-increasing mediatisation (Hackley, Brown & Hackley, 2012). From a consumer perspective, reality television has been explored as a postmodern cultural context wherein consumers blend the fantastic with their own lived experience, creating a form of 'self-referential hyperauthenticity' (Rose and Wood, 2005, p. 284). Viewed critically, media platforms such as reality television are seen as further eroding the distinction between the self and capitalist production/consumption (Hearn, 2008), where prosumer inputs such as emotions are increasingly used as corporate fodder (Bonsu et al., 2010; Morreale, 2014).

Reality television shows such as *Big Brother* were an important precursor to our chosen genre of structured reality, as audiences had already been sensitised to the element of construction in so-called 'reality' formats (Williams quoted in Khalsa, 2011). Hill (2014) views structured reality as a hybrid form of semi-scripted reality television that plays with dramatic construction and social interaction, and can be seen as a distinctive cultural form due to the mediated experience of reality. One of structured reality television's most innovative elements is the close collaboration between the cast and the production team in which producers are allowed privileged access into the real lives of the cast and permitted to film critical moments and major events (Hill, 2005, 2014; Khalsa, 2011). Speed of transmission is also of the essence, given that outside of the show, the characters' real lives continue and are keenly followed by audiences in newspapers and through social media (McQueen quoted in Khalsa, 2011). In terms of celebrityisation, earlier reality formats also paved the way for introduction of everyday actors as legitimate celebrities, evidenced by the popularity and proliferation of reality television formats and celebrities in contemporary media and culture (Bonsu et al., 2010; Hearn, 2008).

Celebrity studies are often influenced by Chris Rojek's sociological monograph *Celebrity* (2001) in which he defined three principal forms of celebrity as ascribed (concerning lineage), achieved (based on perceived accomplishment) and attributed (emerging from the concentrated attention of cultural intermediaries). For Rojek (2001) the contemporary expansion of attributed celebrities are of particular interest, and this is seen as a result of the expansion of mass media and sensationalism. One particularly short-lived form of attributed celebrity is

defined by Rojek as a 'celetoid'; public figures who are '... the accessories of culture organized around mass communications and staged authenticity' (2001, p. 20). Celetoids command media attention one day, and are forgotten the next, and Rojek provides various examples of celetoids which include one-hit wonders, whistle-blowers and the mistresses of public figures. In this paper, we propose that the actors in structured reality television are media-enhanced celetoids who, through a combination of production assistance, self-promotion and marketing-related sponsorships, are able to accumulate 'celebrity capital' (Driessens, 2013) and expertise, thereby extending their celebrity longevity. They can be differentiated from the 'achieved' celebrity that is gained through participating in traditional reality TV shows such as *X Factor* and *Masterchef*.

New terms such as 'celebrification' and 'celebritisation' have increasingly entered academic parlance in recent years as more research attention has been placed on the celebrity spectacle and its possible effects on the public psyche. Whilst some authors use the terms interchangeably, Driessens (2013) distinguishes and clearly defines the terms as relating to different phenomena. 'Celebrification' refers to changes at the individual level: how people are transformed into celebrities through a media ritual that unites 'the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary' (Dyer, 2007, p. 35) and how this manufactured celebrity leads in turn to further possibilities for commodification (Driessens, 2013, p. 643). 'Celebritisation', by contrast, occurs at the social field level: it refers to a long-term structural development or meta-process that points to certain changes in, for instance, the size of the global phenomenon, but also to qualitative changes such as the nature of celebrity and its societal and cultural embedding (Driessens, 2013). In this paper, we focus mainly on the concept of celebritisation, and how structured reality television contributes to the emergence of new forms of seemingly democratised celebrity, and forms part of the shift away from 'achievement-based fame towards media-driven renown' (Cashmore, 2006, p. 7). We are interested in these mediatised celetoids in light of television personae being defined by Bourdieu (1998) as 'puppets of necessity', the study of which may reveal the structural and interactional dynamics of television's power to celebritise in the contemporary marketplace.

### **A Field-orientated Production of Culture Perspective**



Theoretically we draw from a cultural production perspective (Stern, Zinkhan & Jaju, 2001; Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006), which seeks to understand the celebritisation phenomenon as a field of production that places primacy on the 'content of cultural products themselves' (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006, p. 14). Thus, our focus is on structured reality as a type of 'institutional force' (Askegaard, 2006, p. 91) that shapes and is shaped by socio-historical contexts, cultural codes, discourses, and ideologies. Historically within the field of marketing, the production of culture perspective situates marketers as intermediaries in the meaning transfer process where marketers appropriate meaning from culture and embed those meanings into aesthetic marketplace forms (Kozinets, 2001; McCracken, 1998; Peñaloza, 2000). The function of marketing is to act both as a producer of goods and meanings, as well as a facilitator in the communication and distribution of these meanings (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006). Consumers are seen as facilitators in the meaning transfer process through their consumption and enactment of different identity forms around brand meaning.

Within our chosen context of structured reality television, cultural and social stereotypes are often drawn upon and subsequently reinforced (Woods, 2014). For example, *TOWIE* uses the stereotypes of Essex man and woman: 'He is flash, arrogant and sexually prolific. She is obsessed with beauty treatments and snaring the aforementioned Jack-the-lad' (Raeside, 2011). Another programme, *MIC*, similarly deploys cultural codes and discourses associated with contemporary tribes of over-privileged rich young socialites living in Chelsea and Knightsbridge, London. These programmes mirror US-based programmes such as *Laguna Beach* in being 'aspirational, escapist and focused almost exclusively on the romantic attachments of the cast' (Raeside, 2011). As an emerging institutional force of celebritisation, these curious melting pots of real life and drama (re)produce celebrity forms and discourses that span across media formats in ways that mirror or even exceed the capability of more traditional 'achieved' celebrities (Hearn, 2008; Morreale, 2014). Structured reality's resonance emerges from the tangible merging of production and consumption, where paradoxes and issues of credibility are never formally resolved.

A key prerequisite to understanding the relationship between marketing and the production of culture perspective is the notion of fields and field formation (Bourdieu, 1993). Fields represent complex webs of social meaning where actors organise around a particular set of practices, discourses and hegemonies that shape social action. It is generally argued that fields are structured around shared knowledge of information and patterns of activity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Stinchcombe, 1990). Fields are shaped by the constellation of cultural products and actors that are vested in its development and diffusion (Ferguson, 1988). A Bourdieusian perspective, which represents a dominant thread of scholarship on fields, situates actors within a collective social network where each actor struggles to gain resources, primarily in the form of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Each actor deploys different forms of capital in order to occupy unique niches within their collective field of practice. An individual actor's mastery of these different forms of capital will often situate them within a structural hierarchy where certain actors gain practical mastery within a given field network. The field itself is collectively rooted within an existing social structure where 'taste' often dictates the stylistic features of the field (Bourdieu, 1984; Harvey, Press & Maclean, 2011). Meaning within the field is in a constant state of flux. As Moore argues, 'the field is a source of constant struggle and conflict, and as a result, its hierarchical positions, tactics for success, and stakes of victory are always shifting' (2007, p. 440).

Within a Bourdieusian perspective, the notion of autonomy and heteronomy from the field of power is also central to his understanding of how modern culture emerges (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). The field of power is an 'integrative domain' where different types of dominant agents 'mingle freely' and designate strategies for preserving or transforming relations of power (Maclean, Harvey & Chia, 2010; Maclean, Harvey & Kling, 2014). Another key concept of cultural production is homology, evidenced through the field of power, but also within fields, whereby production and consumption have a bearing on each other, meaning that there tends to be a close correspondence between the products offered and the tastes of the audience receiving them (Harvey et al., 2011). Cultural fields are further divided between restricted, small-scale production and mass, large-scale production. Structured reality programming operates as a subfield of mass cultural production; heteronomous and intimately linked to the

media and commercial interests, and where competition revolves not on winning industry esteem but on achieving high audience ratings and levels of engagement. These attributes mean high profits, and that certain field members can exploit their celestoid status and achieve relatively powerful positions in social space, owing to the economic capital that they can accrue. Bourdieu (1993) dedicated relatively little attention to mass cultural production, yet we see the field of structured reality television as fertile ground to explore his ideas, and to gain a critical understanding of the structural drivers of the celebritisation process.

Building upon these perspectives, we seek to integrate sociological treatments of fields and field formation within a marketing-oriented perspective. Scholars argue that the marketplace is a central resource to field formation in offering members a reservoir of meanings that actors deploy 'in the collection, delivery, and interpretation of information about market activity' (Anand & Peterson, 2000, p. 271). The structural attributes associated with culture such as gender, identity and class are embedded, produced and manufactured within the marketplace, and are deployed as resources that help to create and define the field of structured reality programming, consumption and practice. We see fields as constructs of social meanings in which various actors including producers, marketers, viewers and celebrities are simultaneously both producers and consumers of meaning, in the form of political, economic, social, and cultural relations (Ferguson, 1998). This perspective aligns actors as actively shaping and being shaped by marketplace social relations and meaning production. Thus, field actors are not intermediaries (McCracken, 1986), but are themselves active agents in the process, actively shaping, and being shaped by the meanings produced.

We turn now to three culturally productive models that help to establish a theoretical underpinning that conceptualises structured reality's role in the celebritisation process. We highlight theories of tournaments of value as field-configuring events that give new opportunities for collective sensemaking and legitimation; theories of spectacle, which highlight structured reality as organised hyper-mediatised social relations that accentuate staged interaction and an emphasis on (extra)ordinary experiences; and finally, transformative

performances whereby industry conventions or norms of gender, ethnicity or domesticity are leveraged in order to embed these attributes into the show.

### **Tournaments of Value**

At a methodological level, tournaments of value are temporally demarcated events, participation in which confers levels of status and prestige amongst all participating members. Competition amongst participants reserves the highest levels of prestige and status for the winner who is perceived as rising above the competition. This 'winner-takes-all' competition bestows fame, fortune, increased public exposure, and 'career longevity upon the winner' (Anand & Watson, 2004, p. 60), albeit of varying duration. At a theoretical level, tournaments of value are viewed as field configuring events that shape industry practice. They provide platforms where agents coalesce around shared values and belief systems that manifest themselves in ceremonial events, celebration and mutual admiration. An underlying function to tournaments of value is to create practices that industry members use to help influence field evolution (Lampel & Meyer, 2008).

Previous scholarship within this area has highlighted how tournaments of value have come to legitimise what are often seen as marginalised practices that sit outside of popular culture (Garud, 2008; Lamper & Meyer, 2008). For example, Anand and Watson (2004) highlight how the Grammy Award ceremony helped to shape country music as a viable commercial field, and Anand and Jones (2008) show how the Booker Prize ceremony helped to create new fields of literary fiction. Tournaments of value go beyond game shows and simple contests as the journey itself emerges as being more significant, bestowing status and prestige on the winner and, in the process, shaping industry practices and acting as institutional mechanisms for shaping social fields. In a Bourdieusian approach, conflict is seen as a core organising principle of field formation, with the tension between dominant and non-dominant actors being central to Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of the struggle for capital and distinction in social fields (Maclean et al., 2010; 2014). Tournaments of value privilege social structural categories through the display of 'the production and exchange of sign values' associated with a particular event (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 117). The winner-takes-all ethos to tournament rituals effectively

differentiates and privileges certain forms of practice over others, serving to produce, perpetuate and control the system of social relationships and micro-relationships of power (Bourdieu, 1977; Bell, 1992).

Appadurai (1986, p. 21) argues that what is at stake in these events is 'not just status, rank, fame or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society'. Tournaments of value represent the production of this differentiation and 'reify cognitive categories that underpin organizational fields' (Anand & Jones, 2008, p. 1038). In understanding marketplace formation, they highlight how new cultural discourses and forms of practice can emerge and displace existing hegemonies. Taken into the context of celebrityisation, we argue that tournaments of value have the potential to create new forms of celebrity that may challenge and displace existing celebrity archetypes. Tournaments of value formally create a distinct symbolic structure based on a selective and ceremonial judgment of worth that has implications for status, prestige and, ultimately, the process of celebrityisation (Anand & Watson, 2004). In tournaments of value, as in other types of social games, actors deploy their social, symbolic and cultural resources to gain access to the ritual, and subsequently to compete to win.

Reality shows in general are rife with tournament rituals including *The X-Factor*, *The Apprentice* and *Masterchef*, and there is also a popular genre of celebrity-focused contests such as *Celebrity Big Brother*, *Celebrity Masterchef* and *I'm a Celebrity*, within which structured reality celebrities are eligible to compete. We are interested in this particular phenomenon, and the role that participating in these rituals plays in the celebrityisation process within the subfield of structured reality. At a structural level, despite their growing popularity in recent years, shows such as *MIC* and *TOWIE* remain somewhat marginalised in viewership terms, being aired primarily on digital channels such as E4 and ITV2, which typically target a younger demographic. This places some limits on the potential audience that can be reached, and means that their 'celebrity' remains somewhat peripheral to the large-scale cultural production of mainstream channels, which can attract mass, diversified audiences. Agents within this subfield seek economic success and renown, and therefore leverage the celebrity created within the

structured reality subfield in order to enter these celebrity battles. Structured reality celebrities have featured strongly in the line-ups of such programmes since their emergence in the UK in 2010: for instance, *Celebrity Big Brother* has featured *TOWIE* stars in series 8 (Amy Childs), 9 (Kirk Norcross), 12 (Mario Falcone, alongside *Geordie Shore*'s Charlotte-Letitia Crosby) and 12 (Sam Faiers, alongside *MIC*'s Ollie Locke). Series 10 and 11 also features structured reality stars from the US shows *Jersey Shore* and *The Hills*. The shows select them in addition to more established celebrities for the access they grant to younger audiences, and the exposure they garner in popular media. Participation in such shows cements the status of chosen participants as celebrities of worth, as well as underlining the legitimacy of the subfield of structured reality as a *bona fide* breeding ground for aspirant celebrities. These programmes are field-configuring events, where celebrities from a variety of backgrounds and occupations, such as music, sports, politics, fashion, film and entertainment, are recruited to take part in various forms of competition, often involving the cast members being set tasks that lead to elimination, either by public vote (*Celebrity Big Brother*) or expert evaluation (*Celebrity Masterchef*).

For example, in *I'm a Celebrity*, contestants are sent to live in jungle conditions in New South Wales, Australia, and must complete 'Bush Tucker Trials' and other challenges in order to win rewards, such as food for the group. A Bush Tucker eating trial may involve the celebrity being required to eat snakes, spiders, rats, and a nauseating selection of animal body parts, which may be served to them dead or alive. Viewers are able to use phone, text or other interactive voting options to select a celebrity for a trial, and eventually to vote for the celebrity they would like to win the show, who is declared the King or Queen of the Jungle. The trials operate as a 'rite of passage' (van Gennep, 1960), where celebrities have an opportunity to demonstrate their worth, and subsequently change their social status within the group, as well as externally with the media and consumers. When viewed alongside the everyday social interactions and struggles that take place between cast members, and the progressive evictions, it can be seen that the journey of celebrities through the tournament is one of sensemaking, in which norms, values and hierarchies are reproduced or reconfigured.

As temporally demarcated events, these shows are both the products of existing fields of celebrity, but can also trigger changes in how the celebrity and his or her field are perceived. In terms of personal celebrification (Driessens, 2013), the programme is a contest that creates reputational resources that they can leverage to increase their economic capital and to enter new fields. Mark Wright (formerly *TOWIE*) came second in the 2009 series of *I'm a Celebrity* and has subsequently acquired presenting roles in four other television programmes, made numerous television guest appearances, and has become the face of menswear for a large online retailer. Within these tournaments of value, viewers are able to see the structured reality stars through a different lens, where the individual has greater scope for interaction and initiative, and can join the social network of a wider group of celebrities. It is often the relationships that form between celebrities in the programme that become a source of fascination for the viewers, and Wright gained headlines from his flirtatious encounters with an Australian model, as well as his 'bromance' with the series eventual winner, boy band member Dougie Poynter. In a subsequent interview with MTV, Wright (2011) revealed his desire for the show's transformative potential, as he was upset with being portrayed as a womaniser in *TOWIE*, and claimed he '... wanted to show people the real me. The real me is what I showed in the jungle'. Tournaments of value offer the celebrity a promise of agency; a new format of public scrutiny through which they can layer additional socially constructed meanings into the interactive negotiation of reality and the authenticity of their celebrity self.

At a field level, we can see how conflicts played out in a contests such as *I'm a Celebrity*, give us insight into the construction and reproduction of the symbolic order, in particular what it means to be a successful celebrity. A key feature of such rituals is that they invoke and internalise collective social categories, and as the contest evolves, participants' interactions demonstrate their different beliefs and competencies when it comes to concepts such as leadership, friendship, ambition, and so forth. They play a legitimising function for the celebrities and for the genre of structured reality, reinforcing the commoditisation process by focusing our attention on particular aspects of the celebrity repertoire that form a measurement metric (such as their performance in a task). Structured reality formats

themselves operate as implicit arenas of competition whereby the cast of *Jersey Shore* or *TOWIE* engage in struggles and compete for status, and viewers come to understand the commoditised cultural forms and rank their favourites accordingly through following and engaging with them on social media and in gossip columns. However, we see the temporally demarcated celebrity competitions discussed above as fitting more closely with defining characteristics of 'tournaments of values' and 'field-configuring events' outlined in the literature (Appadurai, 1986; Lampel & Meyer, 2008).

## **Spectacle**

Theories of spectacle highlight how the productive forces of marketing, often associated with media and Internet proliferation, create symbolic forms of practice that are emblematic of everyday situations. Guy Debord, a foundational scholar within theories of spectacle, argues that the spectacle is a representation of commodified forms and a function of the market economy, which privileges images as a type of institutional force seeking to unify belief systems (Debord, 1994). They act as sources of production and representation that permeate reality (Debord, 1998). Spectacle draws our attention to how society has become 'organized around the production and consumption of images, commodities, and staged events' (Kellner, 2003, p. 2). This hyper-real system of meaning production propagates stylised forms of celebrity (Kerrigan et al., 2011) that are often idolised and emulated within mainstream society (Kellner, 2003); a prelude, perhaps, to their subsequent 'iconisation', a term coined by Michel Tournier to suggest the gradual metamorphosis and disappearance of a celebrity icon through his or her eventual overexposure (Maclean, 2003, p.24). The rise and demise of celebrities in this regard is an intrinsic part of the phenomenon, as newcomers emerge others go out of fashion and are eventually discarded, as individual celebrities follow (or resist) the celebrity life-cycle. In the context of structured reality and celebritisation, we see tropes associated with love, friendship, sex, debauchery, and infidelity, all leveraged in the creation of celebrity forms. These universal archetypes are key drivers in the legitimation of structured reality in the celebritisation process. What makes structured reality unique in this process is the speed and proliferation with which it creates celebrities through forms of spectacle; accelerating the life-cycle alluded to above



through an ever-quickening production process which constantly demands new ‘fodder’ in the form of new reality programme ideas, and new actors to satiate the demands of the public.

Structured reality leverages their everyday experiences into extraordinary experiences by carefully crafting and re-engineering these events with added effect. Although cast members are often engaging in mundane, everyday experiences, such as going for a coffee, the soft-toned aesthetics, balanced composition and lingering close-ups (Woods, 2014) often betray a staged awkwardness which highlights the production element in ways that differentiate this format from traditional soap operas or other reality formats. In *MIC*, reproduced events are furthermore set in exotic, classed spaces such as yachts, polo matches or designer shops, which signal the prosperity, heritage and symbolism of the Royal boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea where the programme is set (Woods, 2014). This genre of programming legitimises structured reality formats by appropriating existing relationship tropes, and stylising them into hyper-real situations that accentuate the spectacle.

We see structured reality as emblematic of a new stage of spectacle described by Best and Kellner (2007) as the ‘the interactive spectacle’, which encourages the creation of new cultural spaces and forms, and new subjects. Television in general has developed from a one-way communication tool, in which audiences are ‘compliant and pliant’, to a medium from which consumers draw resources in order to enact social relations, through engaging other consumers, as well as celebrities, production agents, and other involved parties. Drawing on a report *Twitter* published about the ways in which consumers use the social network to engage with TV shows, Moth (2012) points towards the increasing connectivity of television with other forms of media, with 60% of all *Twitter* users accessing the social network while watching TV, and more than 90% of online conversations about TV occurring on this particular platform.

*MIC* is highlighted as having a particularly high ratio of viewers to people tweeting, with one in four viewers also actively engaged on *Twitter* during most episodes. One episode included in the report showed that 215,220 tweets were generated from 110,162 users, which could reach a potential audience of 124.2m (Moth, 2012). Consumers can be seen as closer to the celebrities in structured reality, in both time and space. Because of the short shooting

schedules and relatively fast editing and production of structured reality, events are televised within weeks of being filmed, meaning that there can be near real-time dialogue between the celebrity and their audiences, across a seemingly limitless digital network space. The interactivity of the spectacle thus differentiates structured reality from other reality formats in which production and consumption are largely separated, e.g. *The Apprentice*, or formats in which the celebrity is cut off from 'reality' for the duration of the programme and prohibited from interacting with the consuming public and media, e.g. *Big Brother*.

Cast members' personal use of platforms such as *Twitter* is another way for them to generate intense and hyper-real media depictions of themselves, reflecting the more active subject described in Best and Kellner's (2007) new stage of spectacle. Series seven of *MIC* began with accusations circulating that one of its cast members, Alex Mytton, had cheated on his girlfriend Binky Felstead, one of the popular original cast members of the show. This was followed by the cast taking to *Twitter* to share their views and support, with the wider involvement of the public being captured through their reactions, and the retweeting of comments and images; for example, a menu board outside a London pub featuring the message: 'If you feel bad for Binky, Come and have a drinky'. Felstead herself later tweeted a photo of a cocktail named 'Dirty B####ard\*' accompanied by the message: 'Not ordering anymore of those!! ;)'. A cast member of rival programme *TOWIE* even tweeted her support for Binky, leaving one journalist questioning who would be next to tweet their views about the infidelity, Prime Minister David Cameron? (McGrath, 2014).

We see evidence of 'arrested emotions' (Bonsu et al., 2010) and 'self-spectacularisation' (Hearn, 2006) forming the basis of value that is exploited by producers in these scenarios, and this includes significant waves of dismissive, comedic and playful responses from consumers and the media, which add further levels of meaning to the interactive construction of the celebrity. The breadth and intensity of dialogue made possible by Web 2.0 enacts social relations around the spectacle of the structured celebrity and greatly broadens their reach: Felstead has a fairly moderate *Twitter* 'audience' of 726k, whilst *TOWIE* stars Mark Wright and Joey Essex have 2.5m and 2.7m followers respectively (Twitter, 2014). The culturally productive

function of structured reality is to ensure the perpetuation of new celebrity forms through structured interactions that are emblematic of interactive spectacle (Best & Kellner, 2011) and surreal experience (Gabler, 1998).

### **Transformative Performances**

We differentiate transformative performances from theories of spectacle in order to highlight how marketers leverage social structural categories of gender, social class, locations, values and lifestyles in order to privilege particular discourses and representations. These attributes are embedded and reproduced within structured reality programming. Here, we can turn to the work of Ann Swidler who argues that culture does not act as a unified system of shared beliefs, norms and values, but represents a “tool kit” or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action’ (Swidler, 1986, p. 277). In the context of celebrity and structured reality television, we can begin to understand how field agents draw from a repertoire of meanings, which enable them to construct programming associated with these attributes.

We argue that transformative performances act as a type of ‘signifying practice’ (Schroeder, 2005), whereby celebrities come to embody the structural forms created by media producers and marketers. These structural forms can be represented through social constructions of masculinity or femininity, place, ethnicity, or through leveraging standard industry conventions of the body (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2005). The production and dissemination of these structural forms through media outlets effectively transforms celebrities into cultural vessels that perpetuate the intended meanings created in the celebrity process. We consider this phenomenon to be a transformative performance according to which the nature of structured reality programming can be viewed as a type of metaphorical ‘rebirth’, through which celebrities assume new personae through their participation in and transformation through the programme (Hackley, Brown & Hackley, 2012). Our perspective closely aligns with Hearn’s (2006, p.133) examination of the ‘tokenized persona’ within reality television, where participants draw on the templates supplied by producers and corporate media culture to make self-conscious efforts to manage their branded self.

Foundational works in this area highlight celebrities as a 'medium of translation' (Hewer & Brownlie, 2009, p. 483) where 'celebrity is exploited as a mode of production servicing a marketing agenda' (Ibid, p. 482). The celebritisation process effectively embeds specific cultural attributes into celebrity forms that personify them as, for example, the 'domestic goddess' (Brownlie & Hewer, 2001; Hewer & Brownlie, 2013) or 'average bloke' (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007). The creation of these signifying systems based on image, clothes, speech, dialect, food and other elements (Barthes, 1977) mean that structured reality creates particular cultural communications that effectively transform celebrities into stylised marketplace commodities.

*TOWIE*, for example, is characterised by a relatively unsophisticated young people's relationships theme, whose cast and production team have been particularly skilful at drawing on relevant signifiers to create formulaic and fashionable celebritised personas. *TOWIE* draws on established stereotypes of Essex inhabitants that Woods (2014) proposes juxtaposes traditional East End legacies of the working class with an aspirational, self-made middle class that lack culturally sanctioned taste. Whilst many reality shows have played with notions of gender and class, *TOWIE* was somewhat unique in how format and cast members 'play with excess artificiality and awkwardness' in ways that 'flatter a British youth audience well versed in the constructed nature of reality TV' (Woods, 2014, p. 198). In this way, structured reality can be seen as a natural development from previous reality shows, where consumers have already been socialised to negotiate paradoxes of authenticity through active discourse, and potentially value contrivance and fantasy in the interactive construction of their satisfying authentic experience (Rose & Wood, 2005, p294).

One of the best-known male cast members, Joey Essex, has become a poster boy for the contemporary 'primped' metrosexual, ever more willing to adopt aesthetic sensibilities associated with gay men (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2013; Rinallo, 2007) and cosmetic procedures traditionally associated with women. His pearly white teeth, bouffant hair, fake tan and notoriously tight trousers communicate a particular image-focused version of masculinity, touching upon parody, which demonstrates his 'practical mastery' (Bourdieu, 1977) of the contemporary cultural and social environment, and gendered taboos. The interactive

interpretation of Essex's performance contributes towards the increasingly fluid discourses and marketplace shifts in the cultural production of masculinity geared towards '... reassuring straight consumers of the appropriateness of caring about his looks' (Rinallo, 2007, p.80). The appearance of cast members in structured reality is often commoditised and uniformed; in *TOWIE*, the men are without exception clean-cut, tanned, physically fit and dressed in similar attire, typically jeans, t-shirt and suit jacket. Reference to specific brands such as *Range Rover*, *Rolex* and *Veuve Clicquot* are made both physically and in conversation and are deployed in structured reality as artifacts that objectify, for instance, class and gender relations, and which are able to produce meaning for cast members.

Another attribute Essex personifies is his universally endearing stupidity, which Heritage (2014) writes is his unique selling point; a stupidity '... so pure that it could signal the next stage of human evolution'. This links again with regional stereotypes of the Essex lad as dim-witted, superficial, loud and flashy (Woods, 2014). His accent and choice of language furthermore embellish the performance, for instance, he is accredited with creating the adjective 'reem' to express delight or approval. The use of this language is a deliberately captured hallmark of embellished cultural repertoire. On *TOWIE* and other television shows, Essex has repeatedly sparked media interest and speculation at his lack of the most basic knowledge and skills, for example, not knowing how many sides a square had, or how to tie shoelaces, and not being able to tell the time from a clock. The extent to which his stupidity is genuine or an act has become an area of debate in social media and in the press, where Watson (2014), for instance, concludes that if it is an act, it's 'a mind-bendingly convincing one'. Performances are not simply formative in terms of engendering particular archetypes, but are transformative; carefully crafted according to standard tropes and cultural discourses whose narratives are continuously worked upon to produce and personify marketable characters (Hearn, 2006).

As Rose and Woods (2005) argue, authenticity does not necessarily depend on what is genuine, but is rather coproduced by the viewers, who negotiate paradoxical aspects of the programming, which includes the transformative performances of the structured reality celebrity. The hyperbolic nature of this performance, and of structured reality's amplified

representation of its characters and cultural discourses, lends itself to this negotiation of paradox. For example, having now left *TOWIE*, Essex leverages these attributes and persona in a new series entitled *Educating Joey Essex*. When asked in a newspaper interview if he was offended by the title he responded 'No, not at all. I was the one who came up with the title' (Essex in Nanner, 2014): his self-directed career trajectory and willingness to be parodied appear to be paradoxical to his projected 'stupid' self. From a Bourdieusian perspective, we can conceptualise transformative performance as a process of reflexive transformation, through which the celebrity shapes their habitus, or embodied disposition, to the requirements of the field, whilst also shaping the field's trajectory. The discerning viewer's uncertainty over the degree to which the performance is manufactured or real makes them active co-participants in the transformative performance.

## **Discussion**

Structured reality programming is emblematic of an emergent field in creating new celebrity discourses in the celebritisation process. We turn back to the work of Swidler (1986) and her notion of the toolkit and repertoire of cultural meanings, which are embedded within structured reality and provide platforms of common interpretation amongst consumers of structured reality. This repertoire forms the foundation for the structured reality format through the use of an embedded social code, or at least a ubiquitous context allows the audience to access and ostensibly understand the interactions they see.

A core conceptualisation to the celebritisation process in structured reality is the format's ability to leverage social structural constructs in the form of hero/villain roles, gender, friendship, family, infidelity, and industry conventions into its programming. This culturally productive model serves as a vehicle through which new celebrities are produced and legitimised as celebrity forms. Embedding social structural attributes as forms of spectacle, transformative performances or within tournaments of value establishes structured reality programming as a legitimised field of meaning production in the celebritisation process. Structured reality programming is emblematic of commoditised and packaged performances

that are designed to create new celebrity forms with a degree of speed and volume that has been unseen in previous conceptualisations of celebritisation.

Whilst structured reality programming exists on a continuum of television formats that increasingly blur fact and fiction (Hill, 2005) we can also identify nuanced differences in how celebrities emerge relative to other types of 'reality' programming and those who gain celebrity status outside of televised media, for instance on *YouTube* (Morreale, 2014). In terms of autonomy, structured reality does give some voice to its fledgling celebrities, and indeed relies on the inputs and personalities of its cast members to engage audiences. Whilst the production team chooses the cast and edits the footage, the storylines are largely determined by the cast and their lives. This differentiates structured reality from other reality formats where behaviour is largely prescribed by the production team in terms of group tasks, such as those seen on *The Apprentice*, or talent show-style competition such as *The X Factor*. From a field perspective, these celebrities shouldn't be seen as 'puppets of necessity' in terms of being cultural dupes, but instead such celebrities are a necessity of the changing landscape of fragmented media production and the desire for interactive consumption experiences. In this way, we agree with Hearn (2006; 2008), that reality celebrities are not merely being exploited by TV producers but instead are adept actors, who are skilled at creating a persona for public consumption which represents the performative expectations and discourses of the field.

At a field level, structured reality is implicitly and openly driven by commercial interests and the need for popularity, as indeed are many television formats, and we can observe that the type of people that put themselves forward for such shows are often explicitly driven by a desire for fame, media attention and personal profit. Media producers, also driven by heteronomous economic interests, prefer individuals who are ready to accept what is required of them in the production of lively media narratives (Wright, 2007). When asked in an interview if she resented the media attention concerning her personal life resulting from her relationship difficulties being laid bare on *MIC*, Binky Felstead remarked 'That's what I don't like, but that's what I've signed up for, so I guess I have to go with it' (Felstead cited in Stephenson, 2014). We see Bourdieu's (1996) concept of homology as useful here, as it highlights the symbiotic

relationship between production and consumption that results in consumers intrinsically desiring the goods that are produced (Harvey et al., 2011). Consciously or unconsciously, structured reality celebrities come to reproduce the desires of the field, through culturally productive forces that lead to interactive interpretation and adjustment, and which subsequently assist both their personal celebrification and the celebrisation of the structured reality field (Driessens, 2013).

Bourdieuian theory highlights the nature of the interconnectedness of actors within a field and the manner in which different forms of capital and the field of power exert influence over field formation, whilst a production of culture perspective adds further detail by fleshing out *how* structured reality television operates as a distinctive cultural form. We take on board Hill's (2014) perspective that the evolution of reality television to structured reality symbolises an increasingly emotional economy, where the consumers' emotions, performance and experience come to the fore, and where there has been a widening point of consumption for all things social. The blurred lines of structured reality, and the fluid, participative interactions between consumers, producers and the media characterise and enhance emotional involvement within this particular genre of reality programming (Bonsu et al., 2010). The format is explicitly designed '...to invite consumers, audiences, and publics to participate in this process, to offer other perspectives of reality' (Hill, 2014, p. 130). Celebritisation within these shows is an evermore mediated and interactive space where fact and fiction blur to create individual and collective cultural experiences.

This culturally productive process of homologous celebritisation in structured reality television has been conceptualised in Figure 1. We include our three theoretical categories which are indicative of the culturally productive model of structured reality programmes. Transformative performances embed celebrities with attributes of gender, social class, lifestyle and other social structural features that come to personify certain cultural archetypes, such as the tongue-in-cheek camp of *TOWIE*'s 'Essex' girls and boys (Woods, 2014). The interactive experiences of spectacle enact the celebrity's social relations through deploying industry practices of staged interactions that emulate everyday experiences by stylising them in hyper-real situations.



Finally, tournaments of value are periodic field-configuring events that impact on value and power relations and thus establish institutional norms for structured reality celebrities. These three culturally productive models are particularly effective at explaining the high degree of interactivity between consumers, producers and the media which characterise celebritisation in structured reality. This results in the heightened sense of tension and suspension of disbelief, which is key to understanding the success of structured reality as platform for celebritisation in the contemporary mediatised marketplace.

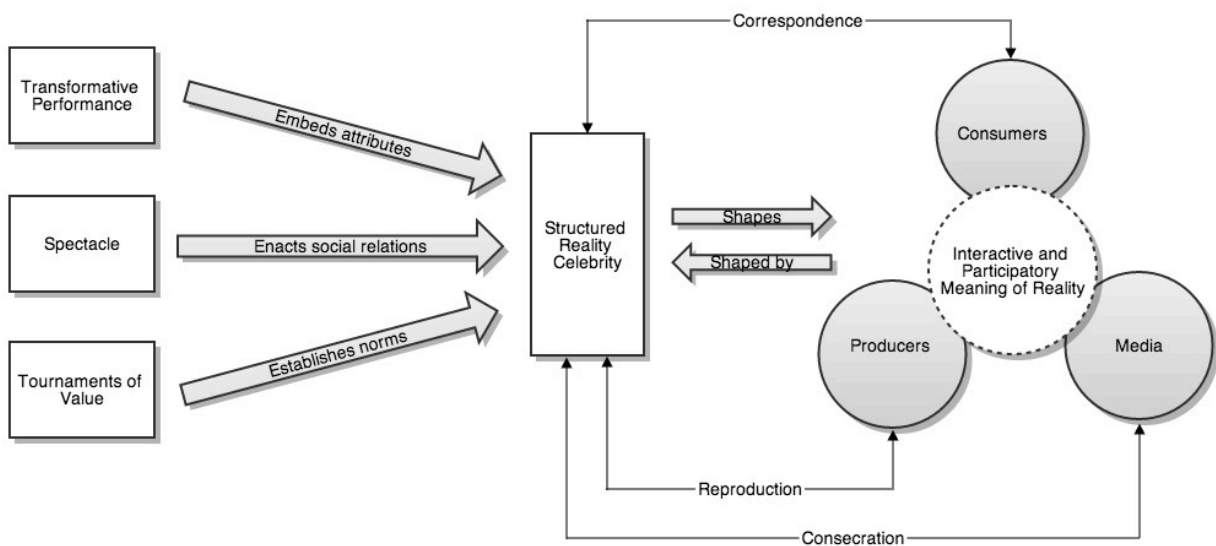
Our model also indicates at a field-level there exists a structural homology between the celebrity in structured reality television and the types of celebrity 'products' that are desired by consumers, producers and the media, which derives from the collective understanding of attributes, social relations and norms. Structural homology assumes that social class structure is linked to aesthetic preference, and therefore that people's tastes are channeled by their position in the class structure (Coulangeon & Lemel, 2009). Skeggs and Wood (2009) concur that all representations are at some level always about class, and posit that everyday stories and 'ordinary people' on television, in particular, are representative of the structures of class-based social relationships. This is exemplified by Channel 4's award-winning *Gogglebox*, whose classed television viewers turn the table on 'normal' television so that consumption itself becomes the spectacle. Correspondence occurs between cultural products (in our case celebrities) and consumers not because of supply and demand issues, or because cultural producers impose their tastes on consumers. Instead, competition between cultural producers naturally adjusts products to the preferences of consumers (Bourdieu, 1984).

The ability of structured reality celebrities to both shape and be shaped by consumers, producers and the media creates a close correspondence between their celebrity personas and what audiences relate to or desire. Reproduction refers to the tendency of aspects of culture such as norms and traditions to be transmitted between societies, generations etc. through a process of socialisation (Bourdieu, 1993). The two-way relationship between celebrities and what we define as 'production', by which we mean in the broadest sense casters, directors, marketers, producers and editors, acculturates its audience to norms of gender, regional

identity and so on, and in doing so is a powerful force of cultural reproduction that is reinforced by the increasing performativity of certain stereotypes within structured reality.

Finally, there is also a two-way relationship between the media, as a heteronomising force, and structured reality celebrities that centers on consecration. Structured reality celebrities engage with the media proactively, particularly through their use of social media, and often put significant efforts into gaining the attention of tabloid journalists to increase their coverage and notoriety. This works in the interests of the media who are in competition for headlines and celebrity news. The media 'marketise' the celebrity, and are a powerful force capable of consecrating cultural entities, acting as cultural intermediaries who mediate between producers and consumers (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). The news media use their particular voice to describe the social world and cultural arrangements in a manner which reflects their heteronomous desire for higher readership figures and advertising revenue (Bourdieu, 1998). Structured reality television's emergence should also be seen as relative to broad shifts in the mediatised economy that privilege commercial interests and 'cultural fast-food'. As a subfield within the broader genre of reality television that raises up the ordinary from mediocrity, structured reality uses particularly persuasive cultural mechanisms to enable the co-creation of a compelling if somewhat caricatured celebrity cast. Its fascination, and addictive property, lies paradoxically in this focus on vacuity and mediocrity; confirming the observation by Gustave Flaubert, that 'Anything becomes interesting if you look at it long enough' (Flaubert, cited in Tournier, 1972, p. 9).

Figure 1: A culturally productive model of homologous celebritisation in structured reality television



## Conclusion

As Dyer (2007) suggests, in structured reality there is the creation of a hybrid form of celebrity production, whereby producers lift an emergent theme from a recent prevailing trend within television, that of the reality celebrity and the traditional form of celebrity of worshipped ‘icon’, and mesh them together. The resultant hybrid (Varman & Belk, 2012) is a structured reality celebrity, presented as a real individual with a real life, they are viewed in their domestic context to which the general consumer can relate. The reality element of these programmes offers an expedient for engagement that is an abstracted idea of normality yet somehow familiar: interactivity, escapism and comfort simultaneously. The introduction of ambiguity creates a space where the structured reality celebrity can flirt with the bounds of its constituent parts, exhibiting humanity and vulnerability when the situation demands it, and departing into more fantastical notions when the opportunity arises.

Structured reality celebrities are, in some ways, ‘puppets of necessity’, needed by the media, television, marketers and other ‘productive’ agents who are in competition to create and distill new forms of marketplace meaning (Bourdieu, 1998). We might conceptualise their emergence

and success in terms of an increasing culture of grandiosity, where celebrity claims are increasingly removed from achievement and depend almost entirely on the mass media who are decreasingly interested in substance (Alvesson, 2013). They are also *willing* puppets who stand to gain significantly in terms of their capital accumulation, however ephemeral their particular moment in the sun.

Leveraging a model of cultural production within the context of marketing management scholarship helps to illuminate new understandings when theorising celebrity culture, celebritisation and 'contexts of marketing knowledge production' (Brownlie, 2006, p. 505). Our aim was not to produce an all-encompassing model of celebritisation with mutually exclusive categories, but to highlight new conceptualisations in the celebritisation process in the form of tournaments of value, transformative performances and spectacle. Our discursive context of structured reality programming gives rise to new theoretical considerations that are indicative of these fields of scholarship and contribute new conceptual considerations to celebritisation scholarship.

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