



## **Mo Salah, Egyptian Hero:**

### **The social and commercial role of celebrity endorsement in football**

*This case study is for the purposes of education only and does not suggest any good or bad practice on the part of anyone mentioned in the case study.*



Egyptian footballer Mo Saleh (Source: Wikipedia)

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## ABSTRACT

Mo Salah, is an excellent, internationally recognised football player and Egyptian Hero who endorses both social and commercial campaigns. He has a growing number of celebrity endorsements for global brands, as well as social causes through his own Foundation and for government campaigns, such as the anti-drugs campaign in Egypt. This case study looks at the types of activities with which he has been associated and the reasons why marketers and social causes use celebrities to create a greater appeal with target audiences.

## INTRODUCTION

Images of Mo Salah can be seen in all different kinds of places in his home country of Egypt. Seemingly every coffee shop, and many billboards, carry his image, along with those of other “icons of Egyptian culture,” such as singer Umm Kulthum and novelist, Naguib Mahfouz (*The Guardian*, May 2018). The power of his image, his “brand”, says *The Guardian*, sells everything from soft drinks to mobile phone tariffs and chocolate bars.<sup>1</sup>

When Mo Salah was used to front a government-backed anti-drug campaign in Egypt, calls to the helpline went up by 400 per cent.

The status of Mo Salah is encapsulated by particular images, which are engrained in the minds of the Egyptian people. A key penalty in October 2017 in Egypt’s match against Congo, someone who rose from humble beginnings to top levels of football and with whom people in Egypt can relate.

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1. Eddie Bower, “Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah, an Egyptian hero for the 21st century,” *The Guardian*, 6 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/06/liverpools-mohamed-salah-an-egyptian-hero-for-the-21st-century>.

Cairo-based journalist, Hatem Maher goes further, calling Salah someone who unites people of different classes, different politics, something which is important to Egypt after some difficult years in their history. Says Maher: *“This is unprecedented for any Egyptian football player at any point in history.”*

Salah is viewed as someone who projects a positive image of Egypt abroad (*The Guardian*, June 2018).<sup>2</sup> The message he encapsulates is that anything is possible with hard work and determination.

### ***Background***

Mohamed Salah Ghaly, born 15 June 1992, is an Egyptian professional footballer who plays as a striker with English Premier League club, Liverpool FC, and for the Egyptian national team.

Salah began his career in 2010, with his home town club, El Mokawloon FC, in the Egyptian Premier League, leaving to join Basel in Switzerland, where he made 47 appearances, scoring nine goals as they won the league title in his first season. Attracting attention for this excellent first season, Salah then signed for English Premier League side, Chelsea FC, who he joined for £11 million in 2014 (Source: *BBC* 2014).<sup>3</sup> According to *The BBC*, *“Salah, who can operate in a variety of attacking roles, has been tracked by a number of clubs after impressive displays in the Europa League last term and in this season's [UEFA] Champions League.”*

Salah did not initially always gain a place in the starting eleven for Chelsea, and was loaned out to Italian Serie A teams, Fiorentina and AS Roma. He then signed permanently for

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2. Salma Islam, “How Mohamed Salah managed the impossible: to unite Egypt,” *The Guardian*, 14 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jun/14/mohamed-salah-brought-happiness-and-pride-to-egypt-world-cup-liverpool>.

3. “Mohamed Salah: Chelsea sign Basel midfielder for £11m,” *BBC Sport*, 26 January 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/25868272>.

Roma in for £15 million in August 2016 (*BBC* 2016).<sup>4</sup> After one season with AS Roma, Salah transferred to Liverpool FC for £35million.

Jurgen Klopp, manager of Liverpool said, on signing Salah:

“He has the perfect mix of experience and potential - this is a really exciting signing for us. I have followed him since he emerged at Basel and he has matured into a really good player. His pace is incredible, he gives us more attacking threat and we are already strong in this area. I like that we will make it even more competitive.”<sup>5</sup> (*BBC* 2017).

### ***Mo Salah at Liverpool FC***

After signing for Liverpool FC, Mo Salah moved from playing as a winger to a striker and became a key part of Liverpool’s team, breaking the club’s scoring record for a debut season with 32 goals. This feat earned Salah the Premier League Golden Boot award. Among a number of awards and accolades for his achievements in the 2017-18 season, Salah won the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) Player of the Year, PFA Fans’ Player of the Year and was a member of the PFA Team of the Year.

### ***International Career for Egypt***

In addition to his club playing career, Mo Salah has represented Egypt at youth level, winning bronze in the 2011 Africa U20 Cup of Nations, also competing in the 2011 FIFA U20 World Cup and the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. Awarded the CAF Most Promising African Talent of the year in 2012, Mo Salah was soon a national hero in Egypt.

After progressing to the Senior Team, Salah helped Egypt to reach the final of the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations and was top scorer during qualification for the 2018 FIFA World Cup

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4. “Mohamed Salah: Chelsea winger signs for Roma on permanent deal,” *BBC Sport*, 3 August 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/36962221>.

5. Phil McNulty, “Mohamed Salah: Liverpool sign Roma's former Chelsea winger for £34m,” *BBC Sport*, 23 June 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/40345138>.

Russia™. These performances helped to gain him recognition as CAF African Footballer of the Year 2018 (*The Guardian*)<sup>6</sup> and BBC African Player of the Year<sup>7</sup>.

Mo Salah is seen as offering “hope and pride” to Egyptian fans:<sup>8</sup> “*He is doing things that any young man would love to do,*” said Mohamed Sabry, a university student. “*He went abroad and his dream came true. He means there is hope that anyone, in any field, can achieve his ambitions.*”

A slightly less positive view from one Egyptian, however, interpreted the story of Mo Salah as being that someone has to leave the country in order to succeed.

### ***Mo Salah and Philanthropy***

Since reaching football stardom, Mo Salah has engaged in a range of philanthropic activities. He has a Charitable Foundation, which helps people in his hometown of Nagrig, in which 65 per cent of people live in poverty. Among the projects he has supported are a school, a hospital and a water treatment plant to provide clean water<sup>9</sup> (*Middle East Eye* 2018).

Press has made much of Mo Salah as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century hero whose generosity and rise to fame are inspiring a new generation of sporting stars in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> *The Guardian* reports Salah’s rise from humble roots as seeming; “almost impossible” to those with whom he grew

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6. “Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah wins African footballer of the year,” *The Guardian*, 4 January 2018. Accessed 19 September 2018.

7. “Salah named African Footballer of the Year 2017,” *BBC Sport*, 7 December 2017, Accessed 19 September 2018.

8. “Mo Salah brings hope and pride back to weary Egyptians,” *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/119315c6-4a0f-11e8-8ae9-4b5ddcca99b3>.

9 Osha Mahmoud, “Our son’: Mohamed Salah splashes cash to give home village a cleaner future,” *Middle East Eye* (website), 26 April 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/Mohamed-Salah-Liverpool-Egypt-village>.

10. Bower, “Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah.”

up and with whom he still chats and spends time on his return back to his home village.

### ***Sponsorships and Endorsements***

Nicknamed “The Pharaoh” by press and fans, Mo Salah has a number of endorsements.

Salah’s deal with Adidas, whose *X18* boots he wears, saw him appearing in an Adidas World Cup 2018 advert alongside David Beckham and Lionel Messi, The “Creativity is the Answer” advert was well received both by fans and by marketing experts. Salah has also appeared in adverts for Vodafone and in EA Games FIFA video games. Such is his popularity and appeal that Salah has received more votes than any other player on a site which allows fans to recommend which player should be featured on the front of the video game, FIFA 19.

Salah did, however, recently get into a dispute with the Egyptian Football Association over image rights, when his image was used without his permission in an endorsement with one of Vodafone’s competitors (*Guardian* August 2018).<sup>11</sup>

### **WHY DO MARKETERS USE CELEBRITY ENDORSERS?**

Celebrity endorsement is important to marketers because the celebrity can give personality and result in emotional attachment to a brand, even when the brand itself is not in a sector, or category, with which customers feel an emotional attachment.

Celebrity endorsement is not a new phenomenon. Erdogan (1999)<sup>12</sup> provides examples of celebrities lending their name and celebrity to advertising of products as far back as Queen Victoria of England’s association with Cadbury’s Cocoa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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11. Andy Hunter, “Mohamed Salah’s focus will not be affected by Egyptian FA dispute, says Klopp,” *The Guardian*, 31 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/aug/31/jurgen-klopp-mohamed-salah-row-egyptian-fa-will-not-affect-liverpool-focus>.

12. B. Zafer Erdogan, “Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Marketing Management* 15 (1999): 291 – 324.

Celebrity endorsement was increasingly common with the development of cinema and radio from the 1930s to the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> There were, however, fewer stars at that time, and not all of them were prepared to be associated with commercial activities. From the 1970s onwards, however, with the development and spread of more different types of media, celebrities became more common across many fields, meaning that marketers increasingly had choice between those who might endorse their brands.

Authors such as Aaker (1997)<sup>14</sup> look at the dimensions of brand personality, identifying five dimensions of human personality and how brands can use marketing communications, such as celebrity endorsement, to increase the appeal of brands by associating them with these qualities: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness.

A number of approaches have been taken by studies looking at the effectiveness of celebrities as endorsers of brands. These include:

- **Source Models**<sup>15</sup>
  - The **Source Credibility** model<sup>16</sup> argues that the expertise and trustworthiness of the celebrity help a message to be heard. Concepts such as “expertise” or “trustworthiness” are perceptions by the receiver of the message rather than a single personality characteristic.

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13. J. McDonough, “Bringing Brands to Life,” *Advertising Age*, (Spring, 1995): 34 – 35.

14. J. L. Aaker, “Dimensions of brand personality,” *Journal of Marketing Research* 34, No: 3 (1997): 347.

15. H. Kelman, “Process of Opinion Change,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 25 (1961): 55 – 78; T. Meenaghan, “Advertising and Development of Marketing Imaginary,” In: *Marketing Communications in Ireland*, T. Meenaghan and P. O’Sullivan eds., Dublin (Graduate Business School of Business, Oak Tree Press, 1995): 318-337.

16. R. Dholakia and B. Sternthal, “Highly Credible Source: Persuasive Facilitator or Persuasive Liabilities,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 3, No: 4 (1977): 223 – 232.

Ohanian (1990)<sup>17</sup> creates a series of dimensions against which a celebrity might be judged, for example:

- *Trustworthiness:*

Trustworthy-Untrustworthy;

Dependable-Undependable;

Honest-Dishonest;

Reliable-Unreliable;

Sincere-Insincere.

- The *Source Attractiveness* model (Singer 1983)<sup>18</sup> suggests that marketers might choose celebrities who will appeal on the basis of their attractiveness because of the importance of visual as well as personality or character appeal. Attractiveness is not just about how the endorser looks but also about familiarity and liking for the endorser and the extent to which there is similarity between the source and receiver of the message.

- ***Product Match-Up Hypothesis***<sup>19</sup>

These models argue that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in ensuring that a particular marketing message is heard through the “noise” of other marketing

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17. R. Ohanian, “The Impact of Celebrity Spokesperson's Perceived Image on Consumers' Intention to Purchase,” *Journal of Advertising Research* 31, No: 1 (1991): 46 – 52.

18. Benjamin D. Singer, “The Case for Using “Real People” in Advertising,” *Business Quarterly* 48 (1983): 32 – 37.

19. Michael A Kamins and Kamal Gupta, “Congruence between Spokesperson and Product Type: A Matchup Hypothesis Perspective,” *Psychology and Marketing* II, No: 6: 569-586; Michael A Kamins, “An Investigation into the “Match-up” Hypothesis in Celebrity Advertising: When Beauty May Be Only Skin Deep,” *Journal of Advertising* 19, No: 1 (1990): 4 – 13.



messages, lies in the degree of perceived “fit” or match between the brand which is being endorsed and the celebrity who is endorsing.<sup>20</sup>

Where the values of the endorser and brand are seen to be a good fit, the endorsement will be more effective in persuading the consumer to be aware, interested or buy in to the brand.

- ***Meaning Transfer Models***

Additionally, research looks beyond the fit between endorser and brand and suggests that effective celebrity endorsement is achieved when the symbolic meaning brought by the celebrity is “transferred” in the mind of the consumer to the brand that they are endorsing: *The cultural meanings residing in a celebrity go beyond the person and are passed on to the products (McCracken 1989).*

It is assumed that consumers will buy brands and products with which they associate, or aspire to associate, themselves.

### ***Pros and Cons of Celebrity Endorsement***

Research has debated whether it is more effective to use celebrity or non-celebrity endorsers. A “non-celebrity” endorser, i.e.: a fictional character which is created to appeal to a particular market, is far easier to control. It does not have a life of its own. At the same time, it may have a lesser appeal than a real celebrity, whose life develops and plays out in front of the target audience.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Grant McCracken, “Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, No: 3 (1989): 310–321, <https://doi.org/10.1086/209217>.

21. Gail Tom, Rebecca Clark, Laura Elmer, Edward Grech, Joseph Masetti, Jr., Harmona Sandhar, “The Use of Created versus Celebrity Spokesperson in Advertisements,” *The Journal of Consumer Marketing* 9, No: 4 (1992): 45-51.

One potential downside of using a real celebrity endorser is that the celebrity might become involved in some kind of public controversy that would have a negative effect on perceptions of the brand.

Research also suggests concerns either that the celebrity of the endorser might be so great that it “overshadows” the brand<sup>22</sup> such that people remember the endorser, but not what they are endorsing.

Alternatively, the celebrity might become less relevant or less famous, so that there is a loss of public recognition of the endorser. It is also important that the celebrity and associations of the celebrity are appropriate to appeal to the target market. Not all celebrities are famous and recognised all over the world.

Research into the impact on customers of multiple product endorsements say that the number of endorsements in which a particular celebrity engages can have a negative effect on the effectiveness of the endorsement and the trustworthiness of the endorser.<sup>23</sup> Previous research by Mowen and Brown (1981) suggests that subjects’ opinion and interest in buying a brand would be impacted by there being multiple endorsements by that endorser.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Celebrity Endorsement and Philanthropy***

There are relatively few studies which look at the impact of celebrity endorsement and philanthropy on each other. There are, however, some suggestions<sup>25</sup> that the relationship

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22. Erdogan, “Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review.”

23. Carolyn Tripp, Thomas D Jensen & Les Carlson, “The effect of Multiple Celebrity Endorsements by Celebrities on Consumers' Attitudes and Intentions,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 20, No: 4 (1994): 535-47.

24. John C. Mowen and Stephen W. Brown, “On Explaining and Predicting the Effectiveness of Celebrity Endorsers,” In *Advances in Consumer Research* 8, Kent B. Monroe, Ann Arbor eds., MI: Association for Consumer Research (1981): 437-441.

25. Nicole Peterson, Elizabeth Tripoli, Kalie Langenbach and Raj Devasagayam, “Celebrity Endorsements and Donations: Empirical Investigation of Impact on Philanthropic Giving,” *Business Perspectives and Research* 6 (2018), DOI: 10.1177/2278533718765533.

between celebrities and philanthropy are mixed. There is some evidence, however, that celebrities have greater impact in supporting causes for which they have a genuine understanding (Wilson 2015, Bekkers and Wiepking 2007).<sup>26</sup>

## **SUMMARY**

Mo Salah, is an excellent, internationally recognised football player and an Egyptian Hero who is an endorser both for social and commercial campaigns. He has a growing number of celebrity endorsements for global brands as well as social causes through his own Foundation and for government campaigns such as the anti-drugs campaign in Egypt.

This case study looks at the types of activities with which he has been associated and the reasons why marketers and social causes use celebrities to create a greater appeal with target audiences.

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26. R.H.F.P. Bekkers and Pamala Wiepking, *Generosity and Philanthropy: A Literature Review*, SSRN Electronic Journal (2007), DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.1015507.

### Case Study Questions

1. Why do you think that marketers use sports celebrities, such as Mo Salah, in their marketing communications?
2. Use Aaker's brand personality dimensions or models of celebrity endorsement such as Source Models and the Match-Up Hypothesis to discuss how and why Mo Salah might be effective as an endorser to consumers of the brands he endorses?
3. Do you think it matters that sports stars might be used to endorse multiple brands at the same time and, if so, why?
4. What are the benefits and potential challenges of using sports stars to endorse social causes?
5. Does it matter if the same sporting celebrity endorses both commercial brands and social campaigns?

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Selection of Mo Salah’s Endorsement Deals (Not necessarily all current)

Deal	Sector	Region
DHL	Logistics	MENA
Vodafone	Telephony	Egypt
Adidas	Sports	
Pepsi Cola	Drinks	
Uber	Taxis	Egypt
Falken Tires	Tyres	

## Appendix 2

### Mo Salah Personal Information

Full name	Mohamed Salah Ghaly
Date of birth	15 June 1992 (age 26)
Place of birth	<a href="#">Nagrig</a> , Egypt
Height	1.75 m (5 ft 9 in)
Playing position	Forward

### Appendix 3

#### Goals and Appearances

Club	Season	Domestic League			Domestic Cup		International		Total	
		Division	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals	Apps	Goals
El Mokawloon	2009-10	Egyptian Premier League	3	0	2	0	—		5	0
		2010-11	League	20	4	4	1	—		24
	2011-13			15	7	0	0	—		15
	<b>Total</b>			<b>38</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	—		<b>44</b>
Basel	2012-13	Swiss Super League	29	5	5	3	16	2	50	10
		2013-14	League	18	4	1	1	10	5	29
	<b>Total</b>			<b>47</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>79</b>
Chelsea	2013-14	English Premier League	10	2	1	0	0	0	11	2
		2014-15	League	3	0	1	0	2	0	8
	<b>Total</b>			<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>
ACF Fiorentina (loan)	2014-15	Serie A	16	6	2	2	8	1	26	9

AS Roma (loan)	2015-16		34	14	1	0	7	1	42	15
Roma	2016-17		31	15	2	2	8	2	41	19
	<b>Total</b>		<b>65</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>34</b>
Liverpool	2017-18	English Premier League	36	32	1	1	15	11	52	44
	2018-19	League	9	4	0	0	2	0	12	4
	<b>Total</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Career total</b>			<b>224</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>125</b>

## Teaching Note

This case study focuses on celebrity endorsement both for commercial and social purposes. The effectiveness of celebrity endorsement both in practice and in relation to marketing theory is considered. The case goes on to look at various combinations of endorsements, both of more than one commercial brand and of both commercial and social campaigns to debate whether such combinations of activities by the endorser might have an impact on the effectiveness of the endorsement.

### **Question 1: Why do you think that marketers use sports celebrities, such as Mo Salah, in their marketing communications?**

The early part of the case study identifies a number of characteristics of Mo Salah which might make him effective as an endorser. Students might begin either specifically with endorsement of brands and causes by Mo Salah and the extent to which these might be effective, or alternatively, they might debate the use of sports celebrities, of which the Mo Salah example is one, as endorsers.

In relation to Mo Salah, a number of characteristics might be identified. These include nationality, level of success, the story and development of the player, his philanthropic as well as commercial activities, and the extent to which he is recognisable and recognised by the target market.

### **Question 2: Use Aaker's brand personality dimensions and models of celebrity endorsement such as Source Models and the Match-Up Hypothesis to discuss how and why Mo Salah might be effective as an endorser to consumers of the brands he endorses?**

The different models of celebrity endorsement effectiveness are explained in the case study. Students should take some or all of these models, Brand Personality, Source Models, Match up Hypothesis and Meaning Transfer models, and apply these to see what can be learned about the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement.

For example, if Source Models are used, students might consider the extent to which Mo Salah can be considered as an expert, as someone trustworthy, as someone attractive and draw conclusions as to what this means for his effectiveness as an endorser.

For match up models, the question is more about the fit between Mo Salah and the types of brands and causes he endorses. What are the characteristics of the brands, the causes, and the target market and is Mo Salah a good fit for these? For the meaning transfer hypothesis, to what extent is Mo Salah an aspirational figure for those in the target market, in what ways is he aspirational and what meaning or value might he added to endorsed brands and causes?

### **Question 3: Do you think it matters that sports stars might be used to endorse multiple brands at the same time and, if so, why?**

Students might approach this question both in terms of the role of celebrity endorsement in cutting through the “noise” of too many market communications which can prevent a marketer's message from being heard and also in terms of the relationship between the different brands. Are the brands, for example, in similar product areas, might one have a positive or negative impact on the effectiveness of another?

Students might refer back to the models in the previous question, in considering whether there is a “fit” between the different brands endorsed as well as with the endorser.

### **Question 4: What are the benefits and potential challenges of using sports stars to endorse social causes?**

Students might consider that this is also a question of “fit” and that the values of Mo Salah and his charitable activities through his Foundation make him a valuable endorser of social causes, which certainly seems to be the case in Egypt with the anti-drugs campaign.

They might also refer to the research which suggests that social causes can potentially be different and that endorsement of social causes might not work in the same way as endorsement of commercial brands.



The question suggests to students that there are both benefits and challenges and, whilst they might find more of one than another, it is expected that they should identify some of each of these.

**Question 5: Does it matter if the same sporting celebrity endorses both commercial brands and social campaigns?**

This might be approached in terms of whether the celebrity has more or less impact for one of the other of these depending on awareness of the target market of the range of activities with which the celebrity is associated.

It could be, however, that these do not target the same market and so, for example, those aware of Salah's endorsement of mobile phones might not be the same people as those aware of or targeted by philanthropic and social campaigns.

Students might argue that involvement in both of these creates more "noise" and lowers effectiveness, or that it creates more awareness of the celebrity which could possibly increase effectiveness.

As in the previous question, students might use the idea of "fit" and "meaning transfer" to debate the inter-relationship of the different campaigns and types of activity.

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