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Impression Management: Henry Cavill on Superman Actor Change on Instagram @Henrycavill

ABSTRACT

The modern entertainment industry is a significant business. The mass media currently focuses on popularizing and idolizing celebrities in the entertainment field. Public Relations practitioners who work as publicists play a crucial role in this industry. Gaining positive publicity or reframing negative publicity from issues and controversies can attract more attention at a significantly lower cost than purchasing publicity through advertising. Henry Cavill is a well-known actor and celebrity who consistently ranks as one of Hollywood's most prominent actors. Recently, he received news that he would not return to portray Superman after announcing his departure from The Witcher. Following the announcement that the DCEU was letting go of Henry Cavill, rumors appeared regarding the reasons for his potential dismissal. This situation is where Henry Cavill should engage a professional Public Relations agency. This research explores Henry Cavill's Impression Management strategies in this situation. The research method employed is a qualitative approach. The subject of the study is Henry Cavill's Impression Management regarding the actor's change for Superman on his Instagram account @henrycavill—data collected through text analysis and literature review. Henry Cavill could enlist a professional Public Relations agency to dispel rumors about his departure from The Witcher and counter the allegations that he is a poor worker. With the assistance of a professional Public Relations agency, the situation could improve significantly.

Keywords: Impression Management, Instagram, Public Relations, Celebrity, Actor.

INTRODUCTION

The entertainment industry is a massive business that spends a lot of money each year. Media and public relations play crucial roles in promoting films, concerts, or celebrities, as many people are drawn to entertainment and famous figures. Nowadays, mass media focuses more on popularizing and idolizing celebrities across various fields, including entertainment. The public's desire to celebrate and admire these figures stems from a drive for entertainment, a way to fulfill the yearning for role models, and a sense of community belonging.

A Public Relations practitioner is often referred to as a publicist within the entertainment industry, as their main task is to generate publicity for various films, concerts, or individual celebrities. Publicists in entertainment are frequently called upon to minimize damage to a celebrity's image or reputation when involved in controversies, such as legal issues or poorly considered statements (How Publicists Work, 2008).

Public Relations practitioners working as publicists are vital components in the entertainment industry. They are valued for their ability to draw attention to a client through selection processes, participating in panel discussions, attending film festivals, and high-profile parties. They skillfully leverage current issues or controversies to convert them into positive publicity. Achieving positive publicity or turning negative publicity from controversies can attract more attention at a significantly lower cost compared to purchasing advertisements (What Does an Entertainment Publicist Do?, 2021).

Henry Cavill is a highly recognized actor and celebrity, consistently standing out as one of Hollywood's prominent figures. He is well-known for his roles in various films, such as Superman (Staff, 2014), and the Netflix series, The Witcher (The Witcher | Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.).

Henry Cavill received news that he would not be returning as Superman shortly after announcing his departure from the Netflix series The Witcher. On October 24, Cavill announced on his Instagram account @henrycavill that he would reprise his role as Superman. Following the release of the film Black Adam, he revealed via Instagram that he was indeed back as Superman. Cavill appears in Black Adam during a post-credit scene, reinforcing the notion that he is returning to the Superman role (Henry Cavill on Instagram, 2022b).

> *"Hey everyone, I wanted to wait until the weekend was over before posting this because I wanted to give you all a chance to watch Black Adam. But now that plenty of you have, I wanted to make it official that I am back as Superman. There's the image you see on this post and what you saw in Black Adam, they're just a very small taste of things to come. So there's a lot to be thankful for and I'll get to that in time. But I want to thank you guys most of all. Thank you for your support and thank you for your patience. I promise it will be rewarded."*

On October 30, Henry Cavill announced on his Instagram account @henrycavill that he would be leaving The Witcher (Henry Cavill on Instagram, 2022c).

> *"Some news to share from The Continent... My journey as Geralt of Rivia has been filled with both monsters and adventures, and alas, I will be laying down my medallion and my swords for Season 4. In my stead, the fantastic Mr Liam Hemsworth will be taking up the mantle of the White Wolf. As with the greatest of literary characters, I pass the torch with reverence for the time spent embodying Geralt and enthusiasm to see Liam's take on this most fascinating and nuanced of men."*

The Witcher received outstanding reviews following its debut in 2019. After Henry Cavill starred in the series for three seasons, he announced on October 29 that he would be leaving the role. Netflix confirmed that Cavill would not return as Geralt of Rivia for the fourth season of The Witcher, with Liam Hemsworth set to take over the role (The Witcher Season 4 Shakeup, n.d.). Henry Cavill congratulated Liam Hemsworth on his new role in The Witcher season 4 (Liam Hemsworth on Instagram, 2022).

> *"As a Witcher fan I'm over the moon about the opportunity to play Geralt of Rivia. Henry Cavill has been an incredible Geralt, and I'm honoured that he's handing me the reins and allowing me to take up the White Wolf's blades for the next chapter of his adventure. Henry, I've been a fan of yours for years and was inspired by what you brought to this beloved character. I may have some big boots to fill, but I'm truly excited to be stepping into The Witcher world. @henrycavill @witchernetflix."*

The Witcher season 3 is set to premiere in the summer of 2023. Following the airing of the first season, Henry Cavill supported showrunner plans for a seven-season run on Netflix (Ankers-Range, 2021). Cavill stated that he was willing to reprise his role as Geralt of Rivia for all seven seasons, provided the show continued. However, he had one condition: he hoped that season 3 would remain faithful to the source material from the book adaptation without too many alterations. Despite this, there have been reports that some writers at Netflix "do not like" the original materials from The Witcher books (Ankers-Range, 2022).

Henry Cavill has clashed with the directors and writers involved in The Witcher during production, and it appears he has ultimately given in. His condition for season 3 to remain faithful to the source material from the books has not been met, leading to his decision to leave The Witcher. Other actors in the Netflix series have expressed that Henry Cavill is like

a walking encyclopedia of The Witcher due to his deep knowledge and love for the original material from the books (Bailey, 2021).

On December 14, almost a week after Henry Cavill's initial announcement about his return to the Superman role, Peter Safran and James Gunn took over DC Studios. Several reports emerged stating that a number of DCEU projects had been canceled, including Man of Steel 2. James Gunn, an American filmmaker for the DCEU, later revealed that another Superman project was in development but would focus on an earlier time in Superman's life. The character in this new project would be portrayed as younger, which means Henry Cavill would not be involved. Cavill confirmed this in a post on Instagram (Henry Cavill on Instagram, 2022a).

> *I have just had a meeting with James Gunn and Peter Safran and it's sad news, everyone. I will, after all, not be returning as Superman. After being told by the studio to announce my return back in October, prior to their hire, this news isn't the easiest, but that's life. The changing of the guard is something that happens. I respect that. James and Peter have a universe to build. I wish them and all involved with the new universe the best of luck, and the happiest of fortunes.*
>
> *For those who have been by my side through the years.....we can mourn for a bit, but then we must remember.... Superman is still around. Everything he stands for still exists, and the examples he sets for us are still there! My turn to wear the cape has passed, but what Superman stands for never will. It's been a fun ride with you all, onwards and upwards.*

All these events are disheartening, especially for fans of Henry Cavill, The Witcher series, Superman, and the DCEU film world. Many people feel disappointed and angry with Netflix and DC Studios because they believe that Cavill, known for being a dedicated actor who loves his roles, has not been treated well. There are countless questions swirling around: why should an actor who has such a deep affection for his character and respects the original story be treated this way?

After the announcement that the DCEU would no longer have Henry Cavill portray Superman, an entertainment podcast called Deux U, managed by the Instagram account DeuxMoi, discussed potential reasons behind this decision. The podcast mentioned that some of Henry's colleagues had previously expressed concerns about him during the production process. While this story has not been proven true, it has spread widely on social media, adding to the confusion among fans (Henry Cavill, Theo James, Phoebe Bridgers + Bo Burnham w/ Jerry O'Connell, 2022).

A Twitter user with the handle @Renfricreyden uploaded a transcript from an interview featured on the Deux U podcast. The transcript included stories about Henry Cavill that quickly gained traction and sparked conversations across social media. Here's the content of the transcript that was shared by @Renfricreyden.

> *"I recently got this message and somebody was like, "do you want to know what really went down?" And I was like "sure," so let me just read it. It says, "at the beginning of the show, Henry was good to work with. A lot of unusual demands that made people feel like he wasn't really a team player, but that's not unusual for a big star. Though in TV, it truly usually doesn't happen until the second season. But in season 2 and 3, something shifted, and he became really impossible for women to work with, which is always a big problem. But even worse here, because the showrunner is a woman. He would try to overrule her and try to get changes made last minute across the board without her knowledge. Which, if you know anything about showrunning, is completely fucked. The showrunner has to sign off on every miniscule detail down to the buttons on a costume. Female writers and directors were suddenly completely ignored on set, unable to do their jobs. Every department head was complaining. He started making comments. It wasn't a sexual thing: he wasn't grabbing anyone, or being lewd, but it was disrespectful and toxic all the same.*
>
> *He's deeply addicted to video games, to the point where it was like working with any other addict. He was distracted, he was late, he was obsessive. And a lot of people think that the misogyny came from gamer world. Video game bro language is not how you talk to coworkers. And he wouldn't stop. Someone on the show compared it to watching get brainwashed by Qanon. Like, his whole personality shifted. Eventually his disrespect escalated.*
>
> *He would rewrite scenes without even alerting the other actors in the scenes until it was time to shoot. He decided that he didn't want any romantic scenes at all. No kissing, no shirtless scenes, etc. He wanted complete control of storylines, but really had no idea of the limitations of TV, structure, budget, etc. He formed a weird alliance with one writer who was also a gamer, who eventually got fired after multiple HR complaints were made. And after that writer left, Henry did anything he could to hold up production and cause problems. Eventually top brass at Netflix was tired of him costing them money with delays in HR investigations. And the showrunner was asked to construct a potential exit for him. Netflix reached out to him personally, and he was given one final warning, and violated that warning in an email he sent to the entire writing staff, right after that meeting. That was it."*

The circulating podcast transcript alleges that Henry Cavill refused to perform sexual scenes in The Witcher series, which were seen as integral to the story aimed at adult audiences. Additionally, he is said to have often belittled his female co-workers during production. The transcript also mentions that Henry formed an alliance with one of the scriptwriters, who was ultimately let go following multiple complaints to the HR department.

It was noted that Henry's behavior toward his female colleagues was a primary reason for his dismissal from The Witcher series.

Although this news gained significant attention and sparked discussions across social media, it eventually emerged that the information was likely false or even fabricated. Many began to question the credibility of the claims, leading to further confusion among fans and followers.

> *Legal disclaimer: I regret sharing a transcript with allegations. These allegations towards Henry Cavill have not been independently confirmed and should therefore not be considered to be reliable or true. I did not mean harm in sharing, nor did I intend for any slander to occur.*
>
> *I apologize for all the upheaval this has caused, as I never intended for it to get this blown out of proportion. My apologies for sharing this alleged and unverified information once more. None of the rumors mentioned should be considered as true.*
>
> *This story did not originate from me, nor did I fabricate it in an attempt to hurt or slander. This is the source from which it was transcribed, which should not be considered verified information as none of the content mentioned is independently verified.*

After some time, it was revealed that the podcast's claims were never confirmed. The stories in the transcript were not fact-checked and could not be substantiated. Once @Renfricreyden learned that the shared information was incorrect, they publicly apologized. Shortly thereafter, the Twitter account @Renfricreyden was also deleted (random tw*tter user [@noonesolo], 2025).

Public relations serves as the connection between individuals or organizations and their audiences, both internal and external. It must create a positive impression on those it communicates with (Setiawan et al., 2021). Erving Goffman introduced the concept of Impression Management, which is the process of presenting oneself in a way that controls others' perceptions by showcasing different sides to gain advantage or a more dominant position for the desired party (Bernadi et al., 2020). Individuals manage their impressions when they hope to be accepted as having a self-image that is liked by others (Alim, 2014). Jones and Pittman (1982) outlined five types of Impression Management strategies based on the attributes used: Ingratiation, Self-Promotion, Supplication, Intimidation, and

Exemplification (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Suls, 1982). Here are explanations for each of these five strategies:

1. Ingratiation is used to make someone appear likable to others. Indicators of Ingratiation include displaying positive traits, expressing agreement, giving compliments, appearing friendly and open, showing sympathy, saying thank you, using humor, providing motivation, and seeming caring.

2. Self-promotion aims to make a party seem competent. Indicators of Self-promotion involve being optimistic about one's actions, showcasing abilities and expertise, sharing achievements, and demonstrating experience in various areas of expertise.

3. Supplication is an Impression Management strategy aimed at eliciting sympathy from the audience. Indicators of Supplication include seeking help from others and admitting to weaknesses or limitations regarding a particular issue or topic.

4. Intimidation seeks to make others feel scared and threatened. Indicators of Intimidation include making threats, expressing anger through harsh language, asserting power as a public figure, disrupting with intimidating behavior, and making sarcastic or pointed remarks.

5. Exemplification aims to portray a party as good and morally worthy. Indicators of Exemplification include focusing on family interests, exhibiting positive behavior, maintaining honest, transparent, and open communication, showing moral and material support, and demonstrating discipline.

METHOD

2 This research article is written using a qualitative approach. The aim of this study is to investigate the Impression Management strategies employed by Henry Cavill in this context.

2 The main subject of this article is the Impression Management strategies used by actor Henry Cavill, particularly regarding his announcement about the change of actor portraying Superman. The research highlights how Cavill manages his public image through posts made on his Instagram account, @henrycavill.

The focus of this study is a specific post made by Henry Cavill on his Instagram, which contains his official statement regarding the news that he will no longer portray the character of Superman in the future. This post serves as the primary material for analysis, as it reflects the communication efforts and impression formation that the actor aims to convey to the public and his fans. Data for this study were collected through literature review and documentation methods. The literature review involved examining relevant theories and literature, while documentation consisted of directly observing and analyzing the social media content of Henry Cavill (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Henry Cavill's Instagram post regarding the news about the Superman role, he employs Impression Management through Ingratiation to appear pleasant and likable to others. Even though he is no longer acting as Superman, he expresses gratitude to his fans as well as to the character itself. In his post on Instagram @henrycavill, Cavill displays a friendly and open demeanor, despite receiving news that he considers sad. After sharing the disappointing news about the change in the Superman role in upcoming films, he shows support for everyone involved in the production, offering motivation and thanking them for their collaboration.

At this point, Henry Cavill could greatly benefit from the services of a professional Public Relations agency. The work of PR agencies is an integral part of the entertainment industry. They are valued for their ability to draw attention and utilize current issues or controversies to gain publicity. A professional PR practitioner’s job entails routine activities such as crafting client biographies, preparing materials for media copywriters, and gathering various resources like photos, video clips, and fact sheets about clients. They also research interesting angles for stories to be published by relevant media, manage clients' social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and coordinate interview schedules with various media outlets.

A professional Public Relations agency employs PR practitioners who work for various film studios and television networks. An agency specializing in the entertainment industry typically has two types of staff: one group that distributes stories about the clients and their related projects, and another that places clients in various talk shows and public appearances. Some stories are crafted by PR practitioners for general release, while others are prepared specifically as "exclusives" for major news media.

Henry Cavill could benefit from employing a professional Public Relations agency to manage his public image and impressions. He could ask the agency to help shape public opinion more effectively, especially regarding his disagreements with the director's vision for Netflix's The Witcher series, his personal views on the show's direction moving forward, and to maintain better relationships with the show's showrunners.

Additionally, he might request the PR agency to confirm that DC Studios still plans to feature him as Superman. Cavill should avoid announcing on social media that he would return as Superman before verifying the studio's intentions. Leveraging the expertise of a PR agency could facilitate public acceptance of the news surrounding his departure from the Superman role and help maintain positive relations with those at DC Studios. Moreover, he can have the agency work to dispel rumors about his exit from The Witcher series and counter claims about being impolite during the production of that show.

CONCLUSION

The entertainment industry is vast, spending considerable amounts of money each year on films, concerts, sporting events, and travel. Each sector allocates significant funds for advertising, marketing, and public relations to attract customers. Mass media today is focused on the publicity and idolization of celebrities and public figures within the entertainment realm, driven by the public's desire for entertainment, the need for admiration, and a sense of community. Professional public relations practitioners work in the entertainment industry to generate publicity for films, concerts, or actors.

Recently, several unfortunate events have unfolded for fans of Henry Cavill, The Witcher series, Superman, and the DCEU. This has led to negative reactions from the community towards Netflix and DC Studios. A series of stories emerged about Cavill's return as Superman, his departure from The Witcher, and then the sudden news of him not playing Superman. Following Cavill's announcement regarding the DCEU, rumors also circulated, creating negative publicity.

This is where Henry Cavill should consider engaging a professional Public Relations agency. The role of a PR practitioner in such an agency is to attract attention and leverage current issues or controversies to obtain publicity. Cavill could request assistance from a PR agency to dispel rumors regarding his exit from The Witcher and to refute claims about being

an unprofessional worker. With support from a professional Public Relations agency, the situation could be significantly improved.

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