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Celebrity Endorsements of Political Party Candidates and Its Effect on Election Outcome: A Comparative Study of Nigeria's 2023 and The United States of America's 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract

The increase in celebrity endorsements among political party candidates and issues surrounding it regarding whether celebrity endorsements sway electoral results or merely contribute to political spectacle has raised concerns among scholars and researchers alike. It is on this regards that this study examined the impact of celebrity endorsements on political party candidates in the 2023 Nigerian and 2024 U.S. presidential elections, focusing on their influence on voter behavior and election outcomes. The study employed the agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972), adopted the explanatory research design, utilizing secondary data from academic literature, media reports, and official election statistics to analyze the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in mobilizing voters. The findings revealed that while celebrity endorsements increased candidate visibility and social media engagement, their direct impact on election results were limited by socio-political contexts. In Nigeria, endorsements were more prevalent on digital platforms but failed to translate into higher voter turnout. In contrast, in the United States, celebrity endorsements played a more structured role in campaign strategies, reinforcing partisan divides rather than swaying undecided voters. The study concluded that celebrity endorsements alone are insufficient to determine election outcomes, as traditional political structures and voter motivations remain dominant. The study recommends that party candidates prioritize celebrity endorsements from figures with established credibility and activism. In addition, campaigns should be complemented with celebrity endorsements with grassroots mobilization and issue-based manifestoes to drive voter turnout. Finally, the need for endorsements to be adapted to the socio-political context of a given country to enhance their effectiveness, and strategies should be tailored to local political realities in other to ensure that endorsements contribute to voter engagement rather than just media attention.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsements, Political party, Election, Election Results, Nigeria, USA

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Introduction

Celebrity endorsements have increasingly become a defining feature of political campaigns, influencing voter perceptions, shaping political discourse, and amplifying candidates' reach, particularly in the digital era (Street, 2012). While proponents argue that celebrity endorsements enhance political engagement, particularly among young and politically disengaged voters, critics contend that such endorsements can lead to voter manipulation, oversimplification of complex policy issues, and the prioritization of personality over competence in political decision-making (West & Orman, 2023). The 2023 Nigerian presidential election and the 2024 U.S. presidential election provide compelling case studies for analyzing this phenomenon, as both contests witnessed an unprecedented level of celebrity involvement. However, the fundamental question that arises is whether celebrity endorsements genuinely influence voter behavior in ways that shape election outcomes or whether they merely serve as tools for political spectacle without significant electoral impact (Iyanda & Fakunle, 2023).

In Nigeria, the 2023 election saw a surge in celebrity endorsements, particularly in favor of opposition candidate Peter Obi, whose campaign was largely propelled by social media activism and endorsements from influential public figures (Okonkwo, 2023). While this engagement fostered increased political awareness and mobilization, it raised questions about the extent to which celebrity endorsements could sway electoral outcomes in a political system deeply influenced by ethnic, religious, and party loyalties (Adebayo, 2023). Unlike more institutionalized democracies, Nigeria’s electoral process remains vulnerable to vote-buying, political violence, and systemic irregularities, which raises concerns about the real impact of celebrity-backed political movements on democratic governance (Olawale, 2023). Thus, there is a need to investigate whether celebrity endorsements in Nigeria translate into meaningful political engagement or merely reinforce existing political biases without altering electoral dynamics.

Similarly, in the United States, where celebrity endorsements have long been a feature of presidential elections, the 2024 contest between Joe Biden and Donald Trump underscored the increasing role of entertainment figures in shaping electoral narratives. While endorsements from high-profile celebrities such as Taylor Swift and Oprah Winfrey for Biden and figures like Kanye West and Kid Rock for Trump were highly publicized, the question remains whether these endorsements had a substantive effect on voter choices (Rosenbaum, 2024). Given the deep ideological polarization in the U.S., celebrity endorsements often function as mechanisms of political reinforcement rather than persuasion, primarily mobilizing existing supporters rather than converting undecided voters (Pease & Brewer, 2008). Furthermore, the increasing commercialization of political endorsements raises concerns about the commodification of electoral processes, where celebrity involvement overshadows substantive policy debates, reducing elections to media spectacles rather than democratic exercises focused on governance and national development (Kowalski, 2023).

In both Nigeria and the United States, celebrities leverage their vast social media followings to promote candidates, but their political messages often lack depth, accuracy, and policy substance (Iyanda & Fakunle, 2023). This raises concerns about the extent to which celebrity endorsements contribute to an informed electorate or whether they merely serve to amplify partisan divisions, disinformation, and political sensationalism (West & Orman, 2023). Given that social media algorithms often reinforce echo chambers, celebrity endorsements may contribute to political polarization rather than fostering substantive democratic engagement (Rosenbaum, 2024).

Despite the apparent significance of celebrity endorsements in both elections, scholarly debates remain over their actual effectiveness in determining electoral outcomes. While some scholars argue that celebrities serve as opinion leaders capable of influencing public sentiment, others contend that their impact is often overstated, as voters are ultimately guided by ideological affiliations, economic conditions, and party loyalty (Kowalski, 2023).

It is on the above note the research adopted the explanatory research design, utilizing secondary data from academic literature, media reports, and official election statistics to analyze celebrity endorsements of political party candidates and its effect on election outcome: A comparative study of Nigeria's 2023 and the United States of America's 2024 presidential election

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Celebrity

As Boorstin (1992, 57) explains, a celebrity is most simply a person who is known for his well-knowingness. Rojek (2004, 10) treats the term celebrity as the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere. Such attribution is contingent upon maintaining a cohesively evolving narrative of celebrity (Gabler, 2001) which is constantly in flux, as celebrities live in a here-and-now world where there is space for new celebrities to make it big (Cooper, 2008). Given that there is so much space for new celebrities, Lamport (2006, p.1) explains; fame is being known. Celebrity is being known by your first name. Monica Lewinsky became famous when people learned of her presidential activities. She became a celebrity when people called her Monica.

While the concept of well-knowingness is not new, technology has increased the quantity of well-known individuals, as "the Graphic Revolution suddenly gave us, among other things, the means of fabricating well-knowingness" (Boorstin, 1992, p. 47). Celebrities have existed throughout man's history, however, modern communication enterprises have thrown the production and idolization of celebrities into overdrive, Shakespeare, in the familiar lines divided great men into three classes: those born great, those who achieved greatness, and those who had greatness thrust upon them. It never occurred to him to mention those who hired public relations experts and press secretaries to make themselves look great (Boorstin, 1992, p. 45).

In this sense, the traditionalist argues that today's celebrities have accomplished nothing. Most celebrities though, regardless of their public relations teams, have accomplished something: they are great athletes, entertainers, artists, musicians, and captains of industry (Gabler, 2001). Critics of celebrity, like Boorstin (1992), reflect with nostalgia upon a time when they believe heroes were great men of great accomplishment and valor, insisting that celebrities in the postmodern era lack the qualities that make a hero truly great. They point to warriors, gladiators, political leaders, and successful Olympic athletes in ancient Greece – the type of characters who live on in history, folklore, myths, and legends, disappointed that there has not, in their view, been a great man since Napoleon (Boorstin, 1992, pp. 46-47). They contend that we have turned from lauding those who reveal God to us, and in turn admire those who "reveal and elevate ourselves" (p. 50). Yet, audiences are fascinated with characters who are more exciting than they are – wealthier and fashionable, younger, and more attractive (McQuail, 2010, p. 360). "Stars by virtue of being stars come equipped with the first two prerequisites for celebrity," publicity and most importantly, their narrative (Gabler, 2001, p. 6). The celebrity's narrative, or story of being a celebrity, is crucial to maintaining celebrity status.

The celebrity need not be born royalty or slay dragons to attain notoriety. Nor is the celebrity's value contingent upon the opportunities for greatness being thrust upon her. The celebrity may indeed be manufactured, but this process is not just one of a publicity factory pumping out new celebrities for magazines to sell stories about and movies to feature. The celebrity is collaboratively created by himself and the masses who choose to consume media about him. The celebrity co-creates a personal narrative that intrigues audiences while simultaneously taking on characteristics of characters she has played and creating narratives that capture public interest (Gabler, 2001). While the process of celebritization can be seen as "a mode of exploitation or objectification," it can also be understood "as a form of enfranchisement and empowerment" (Turner, 2010, p. 13).

The heroes of the past may, indeed, have done "great things," but the very concept of great things is limited by place, time, and culture. While the media industry, particularly film, may have a long history of reifying stereotypes, distorting cultural images, and favoring those with white skin, celebrities have also made political statements through both their art and their actions (Cooper, 2007, 2008; Engle, 2012; Fraser & Brown, 2002; Wheeler, 2011). While the growing number or media outlets seems to amplify the number of celebrities one may know, nostalgia for a time when people did not use public relations to enhance their own public persona is unfounded. The very etymologic nature of the term "celebrity" is Latin, referring to fame (Boorstin, 1992). While Bernays may have been the first to outline the foundations of public relations and call them such, the underlying process of self-promotion was not a novel idea. Julius Caesar, for example, had mastered the art of public relations, publicizing his military victories and using public forums to gain support for his ideas (Du Plessis, 2001; R. Smith, 2011).

While Boorstin (1992) acknowledges those who have historically obtained fame through the arts, he places a value judgment on the contemporary celebrity, asserting that an ever declining proportion of celebrities now come from the "serious arts," but rather from "light entertainment" (p. 59). While all forms of entertainment may not be the most serious, comedic delight in entertainment and entertainment for the masses are not new art forms (BBC, 2003). Privileging "serious art," or even labeling it as such places undue judgment on those who lack the education or resources to access it. The democratization of information and access has blurred the line. Simply "because a form of expressive culture was widely accessible and highly popular it was not therefore necessarily devoid of any redeeming value or artistic merit" (Levine, 2009, p. 233).

While Boorstin (1992) approaches the contemporary celebrity from an angle of tragedy, Goldman's (2011) interpretation allows for understanding of celebrities both as a comedy for the audience, and a tragedy for their psychological selves:

Like modernism, celebrity is not all fun and games. My epigraphs above, respectively comic and tragic, illustrate two persistent aspects of twentieth-century celebrity discourse, both of which find a correspondence in modernist literature. The exchange between Simpson père and Simpson fils imagines celebrity as a glorious way of rising above the masses and transcending the anonymity that settles on ordinary citizens of society. However, the consequence of such exceptionalism, as the über-famous Valentino lamented just two years before his death at the age of thirty-one, may be that celebrity makes the self-contingent; identity depends on an audience for its continued existence, turning the individual into a stereotype, condemned to perform itself until death. This process, we might say, turns the psychological subject into an object, something that lacks agency over itself (p. 1).

Irony ensues as "people aspire to fame, just as they aspire to political power, wealth, income, education, and health" (Van de Rijt, Shor, Ward, & Skiena, 2013, p. 266). For some, the desire for fame is so strong that they are willing to compromise other achievements to attain it (D'Alessandro & Chitty, 2011, p. 369).

Political Party

Conceptually, political parties are organisations whose members have values, ideals and aspirations in common and at least participate in the organised contest/struggles for political power. Coleman & Roseberg cited in Smith (1996, p.199). Defined political parties as 'associations formally organised with the explicit and declared purpose of acquiring and to some extent maintaining legal control, either singly or in coalition or electoral competition with other associations over the personnel and the policy of the government of an actual or perspective sovereign state. This is similar to the views of Henig & Pinda (1969, p.11) who defines political parties in terms of a group of people acting together to achieve some political goals, which usually is control of government. Parties are simply organised or loosely organised groups under a recognised label with sole intent of controlling power through elections (Epstein, 1967).

In addition to the above, Sartori (1976, p.63) provides one of the widely cited definitions of political parties. For him, a political party is 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or nonfree), candidates for public office.' Catto (2000: 59-74) conceives of parties in terms of their place in legislature, as membership of organisation, in the electorate, in government, in bureaucracy, and parties as systems. This has further complicated the idea of having a working definition(s) for the study of political parties, especially in emerging democracies, like Nigeria. For example, party as membership of organisation constitutes the 'focal and rallying point for citizens actively interested in politics' and 'also a community taking care of many needs ranging from social protection to education, to leisure activities and even to personal relationships' (Catto, 2000, p.63).

The greatest problem in defining parties is whether it should be limited to explaining purely competitive parties, as found in stable advanced democracies, or provide a broader conception that embraces single party systems and anti-systems or subversive groups in autocratic democratic regimes (Janda, 1993, p.166). This problem is further informed by the dearth of research on political parties, especially in Africa. This is because of what Erdmann (2004, p.63) describes as sheer neglect of Western European bias of political party research and claims by Africanist scholars of 'uniqueness of the subject.' However, trying to minimise the problem of conceptualisation, Lawson (1976, p.3-4) argues that 'a political party is an organisation of individuals that seeks continuing electoral and non-electoral authorisation from the public (or a portion thereof) for specified representatives of that organisation to exercise the political power of particular government offices, claiming that such power would be exercised on behalf of that public.' Despite, the theoretical and empirical utility of these definitions none seems to recognise the officialness of parties as political associations before qualifying as political parties.

On this note, political parties are defined here as formally recognised organisations whose members share certain common values, ideals and aspirations about how society should be politically, socio-culturally and economically organised for the common good and aspire to translate these ideals and values through the control of government by placing their representatives in a competitive free, fair and honestly conducted elections, without harassment, intimidation and threat of violence (Kura, 2005). This definition captures the

broad understanding of political parties and can be applied to the study of developing democracies. In this respect, the definition also identifies the characteristics of parties and the nature of parties in both new and old democracies.

In democracies, such as Nigeria, parties are still at their infancy stage and many were formed along ethnic, tribal or even, in some cases, religious line. In short, parties reflect the seeming socio-cultural and political cleavages in the society. Since parties as organisations are formally recognised to participate in the political process, they are to a very significant extent identified as political parties. Nonparty organisations no matter the laudability their objectives and administrative articulation, would not be termed as political parties until they are officially and formally recognised as such. That is perhaps, why political associations are required to be constitutionally registered by a relevant body before they are allowed to participate in political contestations of power. Participation in political contestations and establishing government essentialise the role of parties in democratic governance. Katz (1986, p.xi) argues that "... modern democracy is party democracy; the political institutions and practices that are the essence of democratic government... would be unthinkable without them."

Thus far, all conceptualisations of parties, at least suggest their centrality in any democratic process. The centrality of parties in democratic process is informed by their unique functions. This is captured by Schattschneider's (1942, p.3) classic observation that 'political parties created democracy … [and] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties.' Political parties 'organise and rationalise politics' (Garrest, 2002, p.1). In politics, parties have been the 'main intermediaries between people and power' (Hilder, 2005). Political parties are a 'sine qua non for the organization of the modern democratic polity and for the expression of political pluralism' (van Bienzen, 2004a, p.1). Crotty (1993) submits that democratic system of government is 'unlikely and may not be possible in the absence of competitive political parties… orderly government, much less a democratic polity, cannot exist without some form of stabilised party representation.' Yanai (1999, p.7) reasons that modern political parties are special political institutions of representative democracy. These cases categorically underscore the unique and central function of political parties in democratic system. Overall, political parties are seen as inevitable in establishing the necessary link(s) between the state and civil society. They are the gatekeepers and the measuring political barometer for indicating the degree and effectiveness of the practice of democracy. Being the heart of democracy, they make and/or mar a stable political system.

Some of the functions/role of political parties include: governance, representation, policy making and execution, interest aggregation and articulation, peaceful change of government, making government effective and responsive (opposition parties function also as pressure group), accountability, social and integration functions. In sum, wherever a political party exists, it tends to perform common functions at different stages of economic, social, political and judicial development. Diamond (1997: xxiii) stresses that:

Political parties remain important if not essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests, aggregating demands and preferences, recruiting and socializing new candidates for office, organising the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternatives, setting the policy-making agenda, forming effective governments, and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process.

LaPalombara and Weiner (1966) argue that be it in a democratically free society or under totalitarian regimes, political party is expected to organise public opinion and to

communicate demands of the populace to the decision-making and executing powers of government. They maintain that 'the party must articulate to its followers the concept and meaning of the broader community even if the aim of the party leadership is to modify profoundly or even to destroy the broader community and replace it with something else' (LaPalombara & Weiner, 1966, p.3). Parties' ability to perform many or all of these functions depends on their ability to win control of government or a share thereof. It means that public office is important for patronage that helps in recruitment and retainment of party activists and potential candidates for public office and indeed essential for party leadership development (Manning, 2005). More empirically, whether parties in a particular polity are able to effectively perform these functions is a matter of the degree of party and party system institutionalization (Kura, 2008). By extension, party and party system institutionalization is measured by the internal and external activities of parties. Internal refers to all those factors that are only internal to party organisation, such as internal democracy, complexities, finance, adaptability, etc, and external refers to the relationship of parties with their external environment.

Celebrity Endorsement of Political Party Candidates

The endorsement of social media celebrities for election campaigns date back to early 20's (Nwaoboli, 2022a). Media Celebrities are highly regarded in their societies and this enable them to function as effective promoters of persons, issues, products, and causes since they are perceived as believable, trustworthy, likeable and persuasive agents (Austin et al, 2008). If a celebrity promotes a cause of a political candidate, then the media, the audience and policy makers will take notice (Duncombe, 2007).

Street (2002) stated that social movements need to employ the use of celebrities to legitimize and promote their cause. It is no news that celebrities are viable tools for election campaigns as they put their popularity and fame to social cause, and to promote election campaigns. Celebrities have a way of projecting a good image of the candidate they are campaigning for to the public. It was also observed by scholars that there is an inseparable link between politics and entertainment (Ridley 2010). It was recorded that about 194 America celebrities including Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, Will Smith, George Dooney, Jennifer Anniston and others, supported the election of the first black United States President, Barack Obama (Duranak 2012).

Political celebrity endorsement is the use of film and music stars to promote election campaigns for candidates contesting for election. The practice of social media celebrities publicly preferring support to political aspirants during their election campaigns is on the increase. With the immense growth of the entertainment industry, particularly Nollywood and the music industry, celebrity culture has increased immensely in Nigeria. Celebrities do not just get endorsement from brands but also from political aspirants contesting for election. Jackson and Darrow (2005) have established that candidates use celebrities to increase support from the audience, raise funds and mobilize voters. They also stated that celebrities use their persuasive power to make unpopular candidates, causes, or ideas more attractive and acceptable. They seem to suggest that the more accessible and familiar politics appears to be, owing to the celebrities' involvement in it, the more likely voters will be receptive to political messages. This implies that celebrities have a strong influence in making their fans vote for the candidates they are campaigning for or supporting.

The celebrated African writer, Chinua Achebe, is arguably the first to endorse politicians and political causes in the Nigerian society (Achebe, 2012) in the 1960s when he was the emissary for the Biafran agenda. Later in the 1980s, Chika Okpalla (Zebrudaya) and some

other cast of the television drama, The New Masquerade, promoted consumer goods by PZ Industries. A football star, John Chidozie, was also known for his endorsements of Lifebuoy soap. These early examples show that celebrity endorsement is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. In recent times, it has taken various forms mainly through crusades, concerts, campaigns and social media platforms.

Media celebrities demonstrated huge support for the political aspirants of the 2011 and especially the 2015 elections. During the February 2011 voter's registration process in Nigeria, there were non-partisan crusades by celebrities aimed at encouraging young adults to register and vote. One of such was „Our Time Initiative and Concert", which was launched by Oladapo Daniel Oyebanjo, popularly known as "D"banj" along with other music artistes. This campaign educated voters on their civic rights and responsibilities primarily through concerts in the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Other music artistes like Tuface, PSquare, Wizkid, Timi Dakolo and Timaya performed at the concerts. The audience only had to attend the concerts with their voter"s registration cards as passes. The „Enough is Enough Nigeria" (EiE) campaign was another promotion of politics among celebrities using social media. The promoters were mostly Nollywood celebrities like Kate Henshaw, Omotola Jalade-Ekeinde and Omoni Oboli and music artistes such as Tuface Idibia, MI and TY Bello. While the campaign did not support any political party, it promoted the R.S.V.P (register, select, vote and protect) slogan (Itiri, 2015). The EiE project was also extended to the 2015 general election.

Other campaigns led by Tuface Idibia and Kanayo O. Kanayo were the „Vote Not Fight" and "No BAGA" respectively. These projects cautioned youth against violence during the 2015 general elections. They advocated peaceful participation in the electoral process and non-violent transition to power and social change. They also urged politicians to act with caution. Other celebrities involved in the campaigns were Nkem Owoh, Patience Ozokwor and Osita Iheme. Celebrities promoted the candidacy of the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, not only by showing up at political rallies but also through their social media following. Mike Ezuruonye, a Nollywood actor, shared a picture of himself and the Presidential Candidate, Goodluck Jonathan, on his Instagram page and was also visible in a political rally. Ibinabo Fiberesima took to Instagram and announced support for the incumbent using his initials „GEJ till 2019". Omoni Oboli also showed her support on social media with a post that read: 'My president! Goodluck Ebele Jonathan! 2015! #voteyouthempowerment #2015till2019…" Nollywood actress, Foluke Daramola's husband, Kayode Salako posted a picture of the couple on social media announcing their endorsement of the APC Presidential Candidate with the caption: "Stay calm, vote Buhari in. Let's change Nigeria".

Another campaign strategy adopted by media celebrities was music. For instance, Olamide recorded two singles to show his support for the APC party. The songs were titled APC Ese (thank you) and The change we want. Award-winning musician – Bisade Ologunde (Lagbaja) – openly showed his support for the APC presidential candidate. After receiving his permanent voter's card, he posted a picture of himself on Facebook and stated that President Goodluck Jonathan will not succeed in his second term bid. Other prominent artistes also recorded campaign songs for Akinwunmi Ambode, the APC gubernatorial candidate of Lagos, titled Gbabe (Accept it) and Gbo Gbo Wa La Leko (We all own Lagos). It is one thing to have popular musicians promote a political cause and yet another to convert those efforts to actual votes for the politicians favoured by the songs.

Questions have been asked about the factors that propel endorsement of party candidates by celebrities. There are a number of reasons why celebrities decide to endorse political

candidates. It could be that they are disappointed with the way the government is run by the incumbent politicians and believe they can influence voters to support the candidates they endorse. Clarion Chukwurah, a well-known Nollywood actress, stated that Nigerian celebrities are venturing into politics for monetary benefits (Ikeh, 2014). It is also possible that the celebrities supported President Goodluck Jonathan because of the funds he contributed to the entertainment industry. In 2010 and 2013, Jonathan announced a creative industry‟ intervention fund of $200 million and N3 billion respectively. The intervention was intended to open up corporate investment opportunities for the industries, and support practitioners in boosting the film, music and allied industries. The management of the funds was the responsibility of the Bank of Industry (BOI), the Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM) and the Ministry of Finance. Controversies over disbursement strategies and stringent distribution mechanisms dominated the media, with film practitioners expressing intense displeasure over their inability to access the funds. But the presidential announcement had drawn popular goodwill to Jonathan and made him the preferred candidate for media celebrities.

Goals of Celebrity Endorsement

In the United States, actors, musicians, and other celebrities have voiced their opinion on electoral decision making, whether it be through direct candidate endorsement or advocating for policy. This has been evident since the early 20th century, with silent $lm actors Al Jolson and Mary Pickford endorsing President Warren G. Harding (Morello, 2001). In the past 15 years, however, politics and celebrity endorsements have become commonplace, with the public expecting notable figures to endorse a candidate, policy, or party (Jackson & Darrow, 2005). But, the measure of how significant this influence, however, is more difficult to discern. There are several factors that contribute to how influential a celebrity is over the decisions of young voters, with the most important one being political efficacy. A reason why so many types of endorsements are seen is because individuals with low political efficacy will often look for a low-cost, with low-cost meaning minimal effort, solution regarding who to vote for (Kuklinski, Metlay & Kay, 1982; Leroy, 1990; Lupia, 1992). Atkin and Block (1983) found that the public often cite celebrities as credible sources, making their endorsements valuable. The danger in this is that politics will focus on the credibility and likability of its endorsee while focusing less on policy issues (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983), especially as only 26 percent of young American voters in a study conducted by Sax, Astin, Korn and Mahoney (1998) found that being knowledgeable on current political affairs is important (Sax et al., 1998).

Jackson and Darrow (2005) emphasize that young people tend to idolize celebrities more than their older counterparts and that if a voter is already predisposed to a certain candidate, a celebrity they admire endorsing them serves as a sort of confirmation bias. While celebrities play a role in young voters' decisions, there are also other external factors that determine their vote. West and Oman (2002) concluded that if the audience already has an opinion on the message conveyed, they are more likely to listen to a less-credible source that confirms their opinion than an expert who dissents. The attitudes of young voters are also somewhat impressionable, and celebrities among voters this age serve not only as endorsers, but as role models as well, making the youth a campaign target. When conducting studies relating to celebrity endorsement, it is also important to eliminate celebrity's turned-politicians and instead, focus on celebrities who use their existing platform to raise awareness about the political process, which was how Agina and Ekwevugbe (2017) conducted their study. This predisposition makes estimating the effects of an endorsement difficult for researchers to distinguish as you must and an endorsement's impact while keeping in mind the voter's level

of support, interest group memberships, and political preferences (Garthwaite & Moore, 2013).

There are two common types of endorsements for political candidates: entertainer endorsements and political figure endorsements (Pan, 2012; and Wood & Herbst, 2007). Celebrity and political endorsements are at times polarizing when geared towards specific candidates or parties. There have been, however, non-partisan efforts by celebrities to encourage young people to register to vote. In Nigeria, there was the 'Our Time Initiative and Concert' which was held through the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, not promoting a political party (Agina & Ekwevugbe, 2017). Similar efforts have been attempted in the United States with the "Rock the Vote" and the "Vote or Die" campaigns targeting young voters, which led to an increased number of young voters going to the polls (Esser & De Vreese, 2007). Since these campaigns often feature popular celebrities, but do not include a direct endorsement of a specific candidate, their impact can still be measured based on demographics of the young voting bloc at large. Campaigns such as these are particularly effective as they often take place on social media, the primary medium of mass communication for young people, which maximizes their engagement (Chou, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

McCombs and Shaw (1972) developed the agenda-setting theory, asserting that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions by determining which issues are given prominence in societal discourse. Their seminal study on the 1968 U.S. presidential election demonstrated that the media influences what people think about, rather than how they think. The theory suggests that while the media may not dictate individual opinions, it significantly impacts the salience of issues in the public domain, thereby guiding political and social discussions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This concept is particularly relevant in contemporary democratic processes, where media coverage, especially in the digital era, influences public attention toward certain political candidates, policies, and socio-political issues while sidelining others (Entman, 2007). The agenda-setting theory has become a foundational framework in mass communication and political science, explaining the power dynamics between the media, political elites, and the electorate (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

Originating in the early 20th century, the theoretical roots of agenda-setting can be traced to Walter Lippmann's 1922 work *Public Opinion*, in which he argued that the media serves as the primary link between the external world and the images in people's minds (Lippmann, 1922). Lippmann's insights laid the groundwork for later empirical studies that sought to establish a causal relationship between media coverage and public awareness. However, it was not until McCombs and Shaw's (1972) empirical validation of the theory that it gained widespread scholarly recognition. Their study analyzed the correlation between the issues emphasized in media reports and the issues perceived as important by the electorate, concluding that media prioritization significantly influenced public concern (McCombs, 2004). Over the decades, agenda-setting research expanded beyond traditional news media to include digital platforms, social media, and entertainment media, reflecting the evolving nature of political communication (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The core postulation of agenda-setting theory is that media organizations act as gatekeepers, selectively highlighting certain topics while neglecting others, thereby shaping public discourse (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). This theory operates on the premise that repeated exposure to specific issues in news reports increases their perceived importance among audiences. The theory further introduces two distinct levels: the first level concerns the salience of issues, while the second level, known as attribute agenda-setting, focuses on how

specific aspects of an issue or individual are framed (McCombs, 2005). In political campaigns, for example, the media's emphasis on a candidate's personal character or policy proposals can shape voter perceptions, ultimately influencing electoral outcomes (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The digital age has amplified this process, as algorithms and social media trends now dictate issue visibility, sometimes reinforcing ideological divides and polarization (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014).

Despite its explanatory power, the agenda-setting theory has limitations. One of the major criticisms is its assumption of media influence as largely unidirectional, overlooking the role of audience selectivity and resistance to media effects (McQuail, 2010). Individuals are not passive recipients of media content; they actively engage with, interpret, and sometimes reject mediated messages based on their preexisting beliefs and ideological orientations (Neuman et al., 2014). Additionally, the theory does not account for the growing decentralization of information in the digital age, where audiences can shape agendas through participatory media, independent blogs, and decentralized news sources (Chadwick, 2013). Another limitation is that agenda-setting effects are often contingent upon external variables such as political culture, societal structures, and issue relevance, meaning the media's ability to set the agenda is neither uniform nor absolute (Scheufele, 2000).

Nevertheless, the agenda-setting theory remains a valuable analytical tool in understanding media influence in political communication. It continues to evolve, incorporating contemporary developments such as algorithmic agenda-setting, which examines how artificial intelligence and digital platforms influence public discourse by curating news feeds and prioritizing content based on engagement metrics (Napoli, 2019). The theory's application in electoral studies, governance, and public policy highlights its enduring relevance in explaining the intricate relationship between media, public opinion, and political decision-making across different democratic contexts.

In applying McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Agenda-setting theory to the problematic, argues that the media influences the salience of political issues by determining which topics dominate public discussion, explains how celebrity endorsements become focal points in electoral campaigns. In both the 2023 Nigerian presidential election and the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the media's prioritization of celebrity political endorsements heightened their significance in shaping voter perceptions. By continuously amplifying celebrity-backed candidates through headlines, interviews, and social media discourse, the media not only shaped the narrative around these endorsements but also influenced the public's perception of candidate credibility, electability, and ideological appeal (Iyanda & Fakunle, 2023). In this context, the agenda-setting function of the media ensured that celebrity endorsements were not merely incidental occurrences but rather central components of electoral discourse, influencing political engagement and voter attitudes.

In Nigeria, where traditional and digital media played a crucial role in the 2023 election, the prominence given to celebrity endorsements, particularly those supporting opposition candidate Peter Obi, exemplified the agenda-setting process. Nigerian media platforms consistently highlighted endorsements from influential entertainers such as Psquare, Mr. Macaroni, and Falz, framing their support as an indication of a broader youth-led political movement (Okonkwo, 2023). The repetition of these endorsements across various media platforms reinforced their importance in public discourse, aligning with the agenda-setting theory's assertion that media salience influences issue perception (McCombs, 2004). The portrayal of these celebrities as voices of political change increased voter awareness, particularly among young and first-time voters who engaged with political content primarily

through digital media. However, while the media succeeded in amplifying celebrity endorsements, the extent to which this coverage directly influenced voter decisions remains debatable, given Nigeria's entrenched political structures and ethno-religious voting patterns (Adebayo, 2023).

Similarly, in the United States, the 2024 presidential election illustrated how the media's focus on celebrity endorsements contributed to shaping electoral discourse. The endorsement of Joe Biden by cultural icons such as Taylor Swift, Oprah Winfrey, and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson received extensive media coverage, with news outlets framing these endorsements as influential factors in mobilizing young and progressive voters (Rosenbaum, 2024). The agenda-setting theory explains how this media emphasis created an environment where celebrity endorsements became key talking points, not only reinforcing candidate visibility but also potentially influencing voter enthusiasm. On the opposing side, endorsements from figures like Kanye West and Kid Rock for Donald Trump were similarly magnified, shaping partisan media narratives and reinforcing existing ideological divisions (West & Orman, 2023). In this case, the media's selective prioritization of endorsements mirrored the broader political landscape, with different media outlets amplifying endorsements that aligned with their ideological leanings, further polarizing political discourse (Pease & Brewer, 2008).

Also, Agenda-setting theory to celebrity endorsements underscores the evolving nature of media influence in the digital age. Unlike in previous elections where traditional news outlets dominated agenda-setting, the proliferation of social media platforms has decentralized this function, allowing celebrities themselves to become agenda-setters. Social media algorithms prioritize engagement-driven content, meaning that viral celebrity endorsements, whether through Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok—receive amplified visibility, often independent of traditional journalistic gatekeeping (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). This shift challenges the conventional understanding of agenda-setting as a top-down process controlled by institutional media, suggesting that in modern electoral contexts, celebrities and digital influencers play an active role in setting political agendas (Napoli, 2019).

Celebrity Endorsements of Political Party Candidates andNigeria's 2023 General Election

On the 25th February 2023, citizens of Africa's largest democracy went to the polls to elect a new president and members of the National Assembly. Firstly, this followed by sub-national elections, on March 15th, to elect governors and state house of assembly members in Nigeria's 36 states.

The then president, Muhammadu Buhari having served two terms in office, appears intent on respecting constitutional term limits and handing over power to a successor. This points to the fact that respect for the two terms maximum imposed by law has been increasingly institutionalized since Nigeria's return to democracy (Sa'eedHusaini, 2023).

Following suit, the polls also mark the seventh in an unbroken sequence of general elections held since the country's transition from military rule in 1999 representing a continuation of the longest span of time during which Nigerians have maintained the right to elect a civilian president. The sheer persistence of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, in a post-independence history repeatedly punctuated by coup d'état, is laudable. However, the elections also took place under the shadow of considerable social and economic instability. There was heightened possibility that a chronic security crisis and a severely contracted economy will either pose substantial stumbling blocks to the success of polling in various parts of the country or

overshadow the electoral contest altogether for millions of beleaguered and internally displaced Nigerians (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

Moreover, the heightened polarization of the country on ethnic and religious lines, intensified by the identitarian political rhetoric deployed by the leading candidates does not bode well for national stability or social cohesion before or after the election. Likewise, the combined effect of a growing, increasingly frustrated youth voting population, coupled with the fact that the two leading parties have put forward septuagenarians as presidential flag bearers, will contribute to stoking already combustible generational tensions. Indeed, growing disenchantment with both the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), have contributed to generating significant interest, across urban youth and international media circuits, around the possibility that an upstart Labour Party (LP) led by the relatively younger Peter Obi could stage a surprising electoral upset (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

The 2023 election was a three-horse race between the ruling APC, with Bola Tinubu as its candidate, the main opposition PDP led by Atiku Abubakar, and the upstart LP headed by Peter Obi.

The All-Progressive Congress (APC) as the ruling party and most state governors and National Assembly members within its fold, the APC appears to be the frontrunner in the election. The party was founded in 2013, following a merger of regionally dominant political parties: the Southwestern Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN); the northern Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and the All-Nigerian People's Party (ANPP); and factions of the PDP and the South-eastern dominant All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). The APC scored a historic victory at the presidential level in 2015, with the opposition APC candidate Muhammadu Buhari gaining 53.96 percent of the vote over the 44.96 percent scored by the PDP incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan. Since then, the APC has maintained power at the Presidential level, as well as a majority of National Assembly members and state governors. The party has presided over a period of economic and security crisis, leading to an outpouring of public disaffection with governance outcomes. Indeed, recent polling data found that 89 percent of Nigerians felt the country was headed in the wrong direction. Despite this context, the APC is still considered the electoral frontrunner due to its incumbency, the strength of its national political machine and the qualities of its front running candidate (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

Following a contested primary, the APC chose Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a senior ruling party leader and former Lagos state governor to be its presidential candidate. Tinubu's strongest support base is thought to be the predominately Yoruba Southwest, where the APC controls four out of six governorship seats. Widely seen as the political "Godfather" of Lagos state, Tinubu is thought to possess an immense personal fortune which has already put one president in office, having bank-rolled Buhari's successful 2015 campaign. Tinubu has attempted to strike a delicate balance between avoiding criticizing the Buhari administration and articulating his own approach to governance. Tinubu's running mate, Kashim Shettima, was a serving Senator as well as the former governor of Borno state. Shettima was considered popular during his time as Borno state governor and was not only elected to a second term but also shaped the emergence of his successor, Babagana Zulum. It is, as such, thought that his presence on the APC ticket increased the party's vote share in the Northeast, which is also the home region of the main opposition presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar (PDP).

The APC campaign also benefit from the party's dominance in the Northwest, where it holds six out of seven governorship seats. However, as earlier noted, the Tinubu/Shettima ticket was source of some controversy within and outside the APC given the fact that both candidates are Muslim, going against zoning. APC was expected to perform worse in Christian majority states in the Southeast, South-south, and Northcentral because of its "Muslim-Muslim" ticket. In addition to identitarian appeals, the APC campaign has emphasized several policy areas in which it hopes to distinguish itself from its competitors (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

The People 's Democratic Party (PDP), the former ruling party, is the APC's main opponent, with 13 states governorships under its flag and a significant minority of seats in both chambers of the National Assembly. The PDP emerged as a coalition of powerful former political officeholders and retired military officers during Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1998-1999. The party then governed Nigeria at the Federal level for 16 years until its defeat in 2015. While the PDP oversaw a period of economic growth amid a favorable global oil price, the party was also associated with high-handedness, election fraud, and a permissive attitude towards corruption. Since the formation of the APC in 2013, the PDP has suffered serial defections and struggled to maintain its cohesion at the federal level. The party was nonetheless considered the APC's main challenger in the 2023 election, due to its control of elective positions across the country, as well as the vast experience and wealth of the PDP 's flagbearer, former vice-president (1999-2007) and four-time-presidential aspirant, Atiku Abubakar (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

The PDP chose Atiku as its presidential candidate, following an acrimonious primary that resulted both in a major rift in the party and the exit of Peter Obi, initially one of the contenders in the PDP primary. After the primaries, Rivers State Governor Nyesome Wike and four other PDP governors from Benue, Oyo, Enugu, and Abia states, formed an oppositional block (the "G5") within the PDP, calling for the resignation of the party's chairman, a key Atiku ally. As a result, the PDP was divided in the regions which have historically formed its core base: namely the Southeast, South-South, and Northcentral. As his running mate, Atiku picked Ifeanyi Okowa, the current governor of Delta State, ostensibly to shore up the former's support in the South-South. Despite this and some residual support for Atiku among some former governors and power brokers in the renegade PDP states, the party's internal rift means that Atiku was largely relying on his appeal in northern states, which host a larger number of registered voters than their southern counterparts, to construct a regional block of support.

Expectedly, the campaign also proposes to end the fuel subsidy within 100 days of Atiku taking office. While the state would still retain a substantial role in the economy – particularly in the areas of social provisioning the campaign makes clear its desire to shift the current balance of politico-economic power away from the state and towards the private sector with an emphasis on international investment. These proposals, moreover, are built on Atiku's experience, since he was a central participant in the process of privatizing public enterprises which was intensified under the Obasanjo administration (1999-2007). In broad terms, then, it would appear that the PDP's proposals set the party apart from its competitors in degree if not in kind.

Following his exit from the PDP after the primaries, Peter Obi was adopted as the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, subsequently choosing Kaduna state senator Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed as his running mate. While the LP was re-established in 2002 (there had been previous Labour Party's in earlier republics), it has languished at the electoral margins,

having only won one governorship election and a handful of parliamentary seats since. In addition, though the LP was established by leaders of Nigeria's major umbrella trade unions, the Nigerian Labour Congress, it has neither historically gained widespread support among Nigerian trade unionists, nor has it typically fielded trade unionists as its candidates (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

Analysts argue that the LP was founded to dissipate pressure from unionists who desired working-class political representation, rather than to organize working class constituents into a distinct political block. The (uncontested) victory of Peter Obi as the LP candidate, after his having stood for the PDP presidential ticket, fits into a long-standing trend, whereby the LP has acted as a second-choice option for candidates who lose out in the APC or PDP party primaries. Given the LP's weakness, the Peter Obi campaign has relied more on the candidate's pre-existing base and direct appeals to new supporters. The Obi candidacy is partially buoyed by the desire, most audible in Igbo majority Southeast but supported in other regions, that Nigeria elects an Igbo president given that the two other majority ethnic groups have held presidencies. This argument has often been framed by supporters of Obi as a demand for "justice and fairness" in a context where ethnic-power sharing has been considered a norm of political behavior among the party elite (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

Along with this, the Peter Obi coalition is banking on the support of frustrated young urban voters whom the campaign has reached through an intensive social media-based campaign that has appealed to the candidate's relative youth and perceived competence. As the only Christian among the three major contenders, the Obi campaign was also likely derive some support in Christian majority electoral constituencies, particularly in Northcentral Nigeria. The Obi/Datti campaign has also sought to define itself in reference to specific policy areas. A central slogan of the campaign has been its promise to shift the Nigerian economy "from consumption to production". The campaign's manifesto and public statements have, like those of the other party's, also emphasized a desire to remove Nigeria's fuel subsidy, and to strengthen state-private partnerships across economic sectors. Interestingly given that the campaign is running on a Labour Party platform, the manifesto makes virtually no distinct appeals to the Labour movement, beyond a promise to "Submit an Executive Bill to the National Assembly for a consolidated Occupational Health and Safety Act to revamp and improve on the 2012 Labour, Safety, Health, and Welfare (LSHW) Bill" (Sa'eed Husaini, 2023).

This seems to affirm the observations of analysts and scholars who point out that the relationship between the Labour Movement and the Obi/Datti campaign is one of convenience rather than ideological alignment. Interestingly, the campaign in its discussions about addressing insecurity has allowed more room for negotiation with non-state armed groups than do the other parties. Overall, then, the LP manifesto was aims at striking a balance between the APC and PDP positions.

Comparative Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 and The United States of America's 2024 Presidential Election

Celebrity endorsements have increasingly influenced political campaigns, shaping voter perceptions and electoral outcomes. Street (2012) argues that celebrities act as intermediaries between political candidates and the electorate, leveraging their cultural capital to enhance the visibility and credibility of aspirants. The 2023 Nigerian presidential election and the 2024 U.S. presidential election provide significant case studies illustrating the impact of celebrity involvement in politics. In both cases, endorsements from prominent figures were strategic tools used by candidates to mobilize support, particularly among youth and

undecided voters. While the effectiveness of such endorsements varies depending on factors such as political awareness, media influence, and public trust in celebrities, their role in shaping election narratives remains undeniable (Norris, 2020).

In Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, celebrities played a crucial role in mobilizing political participation, particularly on social media. With three main candidates—Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Peter Obi of the Labour Party—endorsements became highly contested. Nigerian artists such as Davido, Psquare, and Falz openly supported Peter Obi, aligning themselves with the Obidient movement, which largely consisted of youth disenchanted with the established political order (Vanguard, 2023). Conversely, Tinubu received endorsements from Nollywood actors such as Zack Orji and Jide Kosoko, reflecting a more structured political backing (Punch, 2023). These endorsements played out strongly on digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, where celebrity influencers engaged in political debates, campaign promotions, and fundraising efforts. However, the electoral outcome suggested that while endorsements generated momentum, they did not necessarily translate into votes, as Tinubu secured victory with 8.79 million votes, surpassing Atiku's 6.98 million and Obi's 6.1 million (INEC, 2023).

Similarly, in the United States, celebrity endorsements have long been a feature of presidential elections, with the 2024 race between incumbent Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump amplifying this trend. Biden, who previously benefited from endorsements by figures such as Taylor Swift, Oprah Winfrey, and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson in 2020, continued to attract high-profile supporters. In contrast, Trump maintained endorsements from conservative celebrities, including Kid Rock and Kanye West, reinforcing his appeal among right-wing voters (New York Times, 2024). Given that the 2020 election saw record voter turnout at 66.8%—partly driven by celebrity-led voter mobilization campaigns—the impact of endorsements in 2024 remains significant (Pew Research, 2021). Campaign events, such as the MTV "Vote for Your Future" initiative and celebrity-hosted rallies, highlight the intersection of entertainment and political activism in the United States.

Despite the visibility and media attention surrounding celebrity endorsements, their direct effect on election results remains debated. Scholars argue that while endorsements can increase voter enthusiasm, they do not always translate into electoral success, as seen in both Nigeria and the United States. The context of voter behavior, political structures, and the credibility of the endorsing celebrities play crucial roles in determining the actual influence of such endorsements (Iyengar & Simon, 2018). In Nigeria, where voter turnout was only 27.1% in 2023, the lowest in the country's democratic history, the challenge was not only persuading voters but also ensuring their participation (INEC, 2023). Meanwhile, in the U.S., where voter engagement is shaped by institutional factors such as mail-in voting and voter suppression debates, the role of celebrities as mobilizers remains significant but not absolute.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis of the 2023 Nigerian and 2024 U.S. presidential elections underscores the complex role of celebrity endorsements in electoral politics. While endorsements can enhance candidate visibility, increase voter engagement, and influence public discourse, their impact on final election outcomes depends on broader political, economic, and social dynamics. The cases of Nigeria and the U.S. illustrate that while celebrity influence is a powerful tool in modern elections, it is not a guarantee of victory.

Findings

One of the key findings from the research is that celebrity endorsements significantly influence political engagement, particularly among younger voters and urban populations who consume digital media. In both Nigeria and the United States, celebrities leveraged their influence to promote candidates, spark political conversations, and shape public discourse. The role of social media amplified this influence, allowing endorsements to reach millions instantly. However, while endorsements increased candidate visibility and political participation, they did not necessarily translate into direct electoral success. The Nigerian presidential election of 2023 illustrated this as celebrity-backed candidates did not always secure the highest votes. Similarly, in the United States, despite widespread celebrity support for particular candidates, other electoral dynamics played a more substantial role in determining outcomes.

Another major finding is that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements is largely dependent on the socio-political context of each country. In Nigeria, where voter turnout has historically been low and political disenchantment is high, endorsements had a limited effect on actual voting behavior. Many young voters who were mobilized by celebrity endorsements did not necessarily turn out to vote, reflecting systemic electoral challenges such as voter suppression, insecurity, and lack of trust in the electoral process. In contrast, in the United States, where elections are highly polarized, celebrity endorsements had a more noticeable effect on campaign momentum. They helped to frame political narratives, reinforce ideological divisions, and rally specific voter bases. While both countries experienced strong celebrity involvement, the structural differences in their electoral processes determined how impactful these endorsements were in shaping election outcomes.

A final finding from the research is that the credibility of the endorsing celebrity plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of their endorsement. Celebrities who have long-standing reputations for activism and social advocacy tend to wield more influence in political endorsements compared to those perceived as opportunistic or politically uninformed. In both Nigeria and the United States, endorsements from celebrities with histories of civic engagement resonated more with voters, whereas endorsements from figures without a strong political voice were met with skepticism. This reflects the broader trend that while celebrity influence in politics continues to grow, it is not absolute, and voters remain critical of who is endorsing a candidate and for what reasons.

Conclusion

The research underscores that celebrity endorsements have become an integral part of modern electoral campaigns, significantly shaping political discourse, voter engagement, and media narratives. However, their effectiveness in determining election outcomes remains limited by structural and contextual factors. While celebrities enhance candidate visibility and mobilize support, their endorsements do not automatically translate into electoral success, as seen in both the 2023 Nigerian and 2024 U.S. presidential elections. In Nigeria, where political disenchantment and systemic electoral challenges persist, the influence of endorsements was largely confined to online activism rather than increased voter turnout. In contrast, in the United States, where elections are highly polarized and media-driven, celebrity endorsements played a more strategic role in reinforcing ideological divides and mobilizing specific voter blocs.

The research also highlights that the credibility of the endorsing celebrity is a crucial determinant of impact. Celebrities with a track record of political and social activism were more effective in influencing voter perceptions, whereas endorsements from figures with

little political engagement were often met with skepticism. This suggests that while celebrity influence is a powerful tool in political campaigns, it is not absolute and must be complemented by other factors such as policy appeal, grassroots mobilization, and institutional trust. Ultimately, the role of celebrity endorsements in elections is best understood as a component of a broader political strategy rather than a decisive factor in electoral success.

Recommendations

Celebrity endorsements have become a critical aspect of political campaigns, shaping public discourse, voter engagement, and candidate visibility. However, their effectiveness in determining election outcomes varies based on factors such as the socio-political context, voter trust, and the credibility of the endorsing celebrity. The findings from the research indicate that while celebrity endorsements can generate momentum, they do not always translate into electoral success. To enhance the strategic use of celebrity endorsements in political campaigns, certain recommendations should be considered to maximize their impact while addressing the limitations identified in the study.

One key recommendation is that political candidates and parties should strategically engage celebrities who have credibility and a history of political or social activism. The research has shown that voters are more likely to trust and be influenced by celebrities who have demonstrated genuine concern for societal issues rather than those who appear politically opportunistic. When endorsements come from figures who have consistently engaged with political matters, they carry more weight and are less likely to be dismissed as mere publicity stunts. Political strategists should therefore prioritize endorsements from celebrities who have established credibility through previous activism, philanthropy, or sustained engagement with national issues.

Another important recommendation is that political campaigns should complement celebrity endorsements with grassroots mobilization and issue-based messaging. The research findings suggest that while endorsements can increase media attention and online discussions, they are not sufficient to drive voter turnout, particularly in contexts where political disenchantment is high. In Nigeria, for example, the 2023 election saw high-profile celebrity endorsements, yet voter turnout remained historically low. To address this challenge, campaigns must integrate celebrity endorsements with direct voter engagement strategies, such as community outreach, policy debates, and civic education initiatives. This ensures that while celebrities help generate excitement, there is a parallel effort to translate enthusiasm into actual votes.

A final recommendation is that the use of celebrity endorsements in political campaigns should be adapted to the specific socio-political context of each country. The research highlights that celebrity influence varies significantly between electoral systems, media landscapes, and levels of political polarization. In the United States, where elections are deeply partisan, celebrity endorsements often reinforce existing ideological divisions and serve as mobilization tools for specific voter blocs. In contrast, in Nigeria, where voter apathy is a major challenge, endorsements must be carefully structured to encourage participation rather than merely creating online momentum. Political strategists should therefore tailor celebrity endorsements to align with the political realities of their respective countries, ensuring that they serve as an effective tool for voter engagement rather than just media spectacle.

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