

Political Star Power and Political Parties: Does Celebrity Endorsement Win First-Time Votes?

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ABSTRACT. Political parties, and more specifically public interest groups, budget extensive amounts of time and money to use celebrity endorsers for their candidate. Do celebrities bring forth enough value to warrant the time, effort, and money expended to make their endorsements public? Using a sample of first-time voters from the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election, the authors examine the extent to which celebrities influence voting while specifically assessing whether celebrity influence is greater for Republicans or Democrats. Implications and recommendations for future research are discussed. doi:10.1300/J199v06n02_08 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Celebrity endorsers, political advertising, voting behavior

INTRODUCTION

The thing I most respond to in the political arena is people that actually don't play politics, and I think President Bush comes from a place that is sincere.

–Kelsey Grammer (Actor)

[Kerry] has the strength, the intellect, and the integrity to set this country on the right course.

–Barbra Streisand (Entertainer/Actor)

One segment of the voting population that continues to elude the voting process and is of particular interest to politicians is that of the young, or more specifically, first-time voters. The 18-24 age group currently represents 9% (28 million) of all eligible voters in the United States, yet on average less than 50% of them vote (CIRCLE 2005). Every four years, political parties attempt to romance these young voters. Enlisting the support of idolized celebrities is a common tactic used to urge first-time voters to cast their ballot, yet it is very expensive (Rosenberg 2004). Do celebrity endorsements really engender votes for candidates?

The Youth Vote in 2004

Of the 40.7 million young eligible voters (aged 18-29), 28 million (69%) are aged 18-24. Fourteen million of these became eligible to vote since the 2000 Election and are classified as first-time voters (CIRCLE 2004). This level of first-time voters is at its highest point since the early 1980s and it is only expected to grow in the coming years. However, despite this increasing number, the young represent a declining proportion of the voting population (CIRCLE 2004). A pre-election study undertaken by *American Demographics* revealed that when young citizens vote, their decision tends not to be based on concrete or factual issues. Instead, first-time voters are apt to process political communication and vote based on peripheral cues or those issues that are less central to the election, and which tend to be more salient when one's involvement level (i.e., the extent to which one is motivated to process all of the fine differences between candidates before making a final decision) is low (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). We will elaborate on Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model later in the paper.

A lack of knowledge of the political process, as well as the issues, influences potential voters' decisions on whether they should vote. The degree and source of search activity is, to some extent, related to an individual's level of involvement with politics. Of particular interest in the case of politics is enduring involvement—the long-term interest in a particular subject matter. In this case, enduring political involvement is viewed as the degree to which an individual perceives the political process to be important. As such, one's enduring involvement is largely a function of the strength of the values and the degree of experience one has with the political process (Rothschild 1978). Those individuals with low involvement are likely to be inexperienced and have limited knowledge of the political process and issues (e.g., first-time voters). This can often result in candidate preference instability (Burton and Netemeyer 1992). This lack of political knowledge and candidate loyalty makes them valuable swing voters (Rosenberg 2004).

Whereas one might assume that this lack of knowledge would motivate an individual to engage in an extensive information search to assist in the decision-making process, this, in the case of voting behavior, is often not true. Downs (1957) suggests that the incentive of most citizens to acquire information about voting is very small. Further, it has been proposed that involvement levels may impact the learning hierarchy by which individuals make decisions and the extent to which they are influenced by political advertising (Rothschild 1978). This should make the

role and influence of advertising and opinion leaders both powerful and important.

Opinion Leaders

Due to their inexperience and limited knowledge of the political process, first-time voters are quite susceptible to personal influence (Burton and Netemeyer 1992), particularly in the area of opinion leadership. The term opinion leadership implies that individuals do not acquire information and advice from just anyone as to for whom to vote. Rather, they are more likely to seek the council of those who they perceive to be somewhat experienced and knowledgeable. Thus, the potential for opinion leaders to shape public opinion is great (Omura and Talarzyk 1983; O'Casey and Pecotich 2005).

Influence of Subjective Norms

Opinion leaders are not the only influential agents on first-time voting. Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action (1977) closely examines the issue of attitude-behavior consistency. They find that the best predictors of our behavior are our intentions, which in turn are determined by our attitudes and subjective norms (i.e., for whom significant others and close friends would vote). For example, if my parents and peers vote for Bush, this should increase the likelihood that I will vote for Bush, especially if I am not personally involved in the decision. In other words, subjective norms may have a greater impact on voting behavior than other influences including opinion leaders, such as the media and celebrity endorsers.

The Theory of Reasoned Action is most successful when applied to situations that are under an individual's volitional control. However, when a situation arises in which the individual does not have complete control, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1985) is more appropriate. In this theory, control includes both external and internal factors. External factors include those that are situational or environmental. Internal factors include those such as skill and ability. Individuals are less likely to form a strong intention to perform a specific behavior, in this case voting, if they believe they lack the necessary resources or ability to do so. First-time voters may have attitudes and subjective norms which point toward intentions to vote for one specific candidate. However, if they perceive that they do not have the needed behavioral

control to accomplish the end behavior, they may choose to avoid the behavior entirely.

For example, some first-time voters do not vote because they do not perceive that their vote will make a difference. To illustrate, a first-time Republican voter who resides in a largely Democratic state may not make the effort to drive or walk to the poll to vote if s/he believes that the vote will have little or no effect in a state whose party affiliation is so strongly Democratic. In other words, feeling as though s/he has no control over the overall state's vote for a specific candidate, the first-time voter may opt to abstain from the voting process.

In an effort to overcome the voter's perceived lack of control and/or influence, voting advocates and political parties utilize celebrities and mass media coverage of politics and political campaigns to reinforce subjective norms and voting intentions (Howell 1986; O'Shaughnessy 1987). Celebrities are utilized because they are an inspiration for many young people and often act as a reference group for some decisions (Kamins 1990). The premise behind the use of celebrity endorsers is that they will not only draw attention, but the image values associated with them will also be transferred to the product (in this case, a political candidate) (Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore 1994; O'Mahony and Meenaghan 1997; Till and Shimp 1998). In terms of politics, celebrities bring visibility and money to campaigns/agendas (Maurstad 2004). Their involvement often garners or reinvigorates poor or waning media attention enhancing a party's ability to promote their message (Harper's Magazine 1992). Furthermore, their star power can bring "hipness" to candidates that are otherwise perceived as being too conservative or outdated (Maurstad 2004).

Celebrity Involvement in the 2004 Election

In the 2004 Presidential Election, celebrity involvement was high. A variety of celebrities including actors, entertainers, athletes, and media figures availed themselves for advertising campaigns and community events aimed at encouraging young people to vote in general, and tender their ballot toward (or in some cases against) a specific candidate. For example, actors such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Samuel Jackson participated in the "Get-Out-The-Vote" campaign by appearing in a series of 30-second public service announcements aimed at motivating young Americans to exercise their right to vote. Entertainer Bruce Springsteen instigated a "Vote for Change" concert tour which brought over 20 artists to a number of key electoral battleground states. The goal of the tour was to get people to the polls to vote for change.

Using print media reports on the election as a basis for evaluation, it appears that those celebrities actively involved in the 2004 Election were, to a large extent, not aligned with the Republican Party. An audit of major online media databases (e.g., Lexis-Nexus and Newssource) for articles relating to celebrity involvement in the 2004 Election resulted in more articles on Democratic celebrities than Republicans. Review of these articles yielded a number of direct quotes, the majority of which were against the current President (i.e., a Republican) rather than for the Democratic candidate.

Some may speculate that this is due to the fact that a majority of celebrities are liberal democrats (Dimitri 2005). Others may claim that the media in general are more likely to be drawn to and report on the controversial or negative opinions that challenge the status quo and current presidency, or even that the media in the United States is largely left-wing. Others may disagree completely, believing that there is balanced coverage and reporting of each party. Regardless, it appears that Democratic celebrities in the 2004 Election had a larger share of voice and this had the potential to influence public opinion.

This then leads to the question: "How do young voters respond to these negative messages?" Much has been written on the effects of negative information on consumer evaluation of brands (Till and Shimp 1998), as well as the consequences of celebrity endorsers who are embroiled in controversy (Louie and Obermiller 2002). In the political arena, research has historically focused on the effects of negative advertisements, much of which has concluded that when a campaign utilizes negative tactics, the voter's evaluation of both the sponsor and target of the message has the potential to be lowered (Merritt 1984; Pinkleton 1997). However, a more recent seminal study by Klein and Ahluwalia (2005) revealed that, contrary to prior research findings, there does not exist a widespread negativity effect, or a tendency for all individuals to allow candidate weaknesses to play a larger role than candidate strengths in the way that they evaluate candidates. However, this negativity effect is really only present for voters that *dislike* the candidate being evaluated.

One way of exploring the manner by which voters generally deal with negative celebrity communications is from a Balance Theory perspective (Heider 1946, 1958). According to this theory, if harmony/balance does not exist among voters, their attitude toward the political candidate, and their attitude toward the celebrity, they may react in one of three ways. First, they may change their attitude toward the political party or celebrity. In addition, they could opt to negate the relationship (i.e., saying that "celebrities know little to nothing about politics")

between the celebrity and the candidate. Finally, they might choose to “leave the field” by not thinking any further about the subject (Solomon 2004). Whereas this theory does not predict the route which the voter will take, given first-time voters’ lack of involvement in politics, it may be easier for them to ignore or reject the negative message rather than invest the necessary time to process the information. Supporters of the candidate targeted by these negative messages (i.e., Republicans) may be more likely than opponents of the candidate (i.e., Democrats) to filter out negative communication as opposed to changing their attitude.

Despite the high celebrity involvement in the 2004 Election, there is much skepticism as to how constructive they were in influencing the youth vote. A 2004 study undertaken by MediaVest, a division of Sarcom MediaVest Group, suggests that celebrities are persuasive in influencing votes. Their poll of 1,000 voters revealed that approximately 40% of individuals aged 18-24 (compared with 15% of all adults) are influenced to some degree by celebrity endorsements (MediaVest 2004). Conversely, some academic (Grimes 2004) and industry sources (Fletcher 2004; Maurstad 2004) suggest that celebrities have little or no impact on voters, with some in the advertising industry going as far as to suggest that they can do more harm than good (The Front Runner 2004). Interestingly, a poll of 980 potential voters revealed that 65% of respondents indicated that they were more likely to support a candidate that *avoided* celebrity involvement (The Front Runner 2004).

Given these mixed reviews, why is celebrity endorsement successful in traditional brand marketing, yet perhaps unsuccessful in certain areas of political marketing? To address this issue, it is important to explore factors that influence the selection of a marketing communication source.

In traditional (product and service) advertising, when selecting a communication source (e.g., a celebrity), advertisers seek a person who is (1) one with whom the target market can identify, (2) attractive, and (3) perceived as credible (Belch and Belch 2001). Source credibility, the extent to which the communicator/source possesses positive characteristics influencing the degree to which the receiver will accept the message, has long been deemed an important variable in source selection (Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Ohanian 1990). After extensive research, Ohanian (1990) (as found in Erdogan 1999) constructed and validated a method of assessing source credibility. This 15-item semantic differential scale measures source credibility based on expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Expertise considers factors such as the source’s level of knowledge, skill, and experience, while trustworthiness refers to issues such as

honesty, reliability, and sincerity. Whereas an argument can be made that at least some of the celebrities in the 2004 Election resonated well with young voters, their expertise and trustworthiness may have been questionable. With the exception of a few serious celebrity activists (e.g., entertainer/actor Barbra Streisand and actor Martin Sheen), it has been suggested that the majority of famous faces are involved not because they take public policy seriously, but because it is the trendy thing to do (Maurstad 2004). To illustrate, actor Ben Affleck, who strongly supported 2000 Democratic candidate Al Gore and even traveled the country with him to encourage the U.S. youth to get out and vote, reportedly failed to vote in 2000 (The Smoking Gun 2003). Inconsistencies of this nature may lead people to question a celebrity's motivation thereby undermining her/his credibility as an endorser.

In terms of attractiveness, prior research has found that physical attractiveness is an important cue in the early judgment of others (Baker and Churchill 1977; Kahle and Homer 1985). Ohanian (1990) evaluates attractiveness using a number of factors including the degree to which the source is sexy, classy, beautiful, and elegant. In traditional marketing, a number of studies have concluded that attractive sources are more likely to have a positive impact on the products with which they are associated, and that by increasing attractiveness, one can facilitate a positive attitude change (Joseph 1982; Kahle and Homer 1985).

As a facilitator of persuasion, attractiveness is what Petty and Cacioppo (1986) classify as a peripheral cue in their Elaboration Likelihood Model. The Elaboration Likelihood Model contends that those factors which facilitate persuasion vary under different levels of involvement (high vs. low). In their research, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) characterize involvement as the extent to which an individual is motivated and able to process all of the details that are linked with making a decision or gathering information to make decision making easier.

If a voter is involved in the political decision, s/he will listen carefully to the issues at hand and to how each politician would handle the controversial topics if elected (central route). On the other hand, if the voter's involvement is low and s/he does not have both the motivation and ability to engage in a detailed evaluation search of the various factors and stances on the issue(s), persuasion emanates from the peripheral route. Here, persuasion is engendered by non-issue-relevant concerns (e.g., attractiveness of the source).

Findings of a pre-election study suggest that first-time voters are not particularly involved in political campaigns (Rosenberg 2004) and thus there may be little to no effortful cognitive activity. As a result, the

voter's thoughts will be guided by his/her pre-existing attitude on the issue or peripheral cues in the environment.

The Present Research

Utilizing the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election as a backdrop, this study seeks to explore and update the current body of knowledge on factors that influence youth voting behavior and decision making in today's voting world. The purpose of the present research is to gain insight in youth voting behaviors in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election. More specifically, we sought to understand the following: To what extent did significant others and celebrity endorsements influence for whom first-timers voted, and did a first-timer's political party play a role in the influence of a celebrity endorsing a candidate? It is important to point out that the emphasis of this study was the influence of celebrities in general as opposed to the impact of any specific celebrity.

HYPOTHESES

Previous research on youth voting behavior suggests that when an individual's level of involvement is low, there is a greater reliance on others to assist with decision making (Burton and Netemeyer, 1992). Therefore, based on Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) finding that in cases of low involvement, pre-existing attitudes are more significant predictors of eventual attitudes, especially when peripheral cues are no longer salient, we predict the following:

H1: Family members and significant others will have the greatest influence on a first-time voter's selection of a political candidate.

Given the large share of voice that Democratic celebrities have received from the media in the months leading to the election, and the likelihood of Republican supporters filtering out these negative messages (based on the implications from Balance Theory in terms of how differences in party preference will influence reactions to celebrity influence in the 2004 Election), we also predict the following:

H2: First-time Republican supporters are more likely to ignore or reject the use of celebrity endorsers than first-time Democratic supporters.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Respondents were recruited from a medium-sized private university located in the northeast of the United States. E-mail invitations were forwarded to a random sample of currently registered undergraduate students. Participation was voluntary and responses were anonymous. A total of 506 responses were received.

Procedure

Data were collected using an online survey exploring the factors influencing candidate selection. All participants reported their political party (i.e., Republican, Democrat, or other) and their primary reason for voting. In addition, on seven-point scales where 1 = Low and 7 = High, all respondents were asked the extent to which family and friends, celebrity-facilitated advertising campaigns, and celebrity-attended events (e.g., concerts and rallies) assisted them in making the decision as to whether they should vote, and for which specific candidate they should vote.

In addition, participants were asked to recall the names of celebrities who encouraged them to vote in general, and to indicate which of those listed encouraged them to vote for one specific candidate. Age and gender were also assessed. We conducted t-tests and examined other simple effects via the use of chi-square analyses.

RESULTS

Of the 506 participants who responded, 353 (70%) voted in the 2004 Election (57% male, 43% female; average age of 20 years). In terms of party endorsement, 41% voted Republican, 39% voted Democratic, .3% voted other, and approximately 20% declined to reveal their party affiliation. There were no effects of gender or age on the items that we discuss and so neither of these variables will be discussed in the analyses that follow.

Primary Reason for Voting

When asked about their primary reason for voting, 35% stated that they felt it was their responsibility/duty and 23% stated that they felt

strongly about a number of issues. A chi-square analysis revealed that Republican supporters were more likely to vote out of a sense of responsibility/duty (48%) whereas supporters of the Democratic party were more likely to vote because they felt strongly about the issues (29%), $\chi^2(277) = 38.52, p < .001$ (see Table 1).

Influencing Agents

First-time voting respondents indicated that the two *least* influential reasons as to for whom they voted were community events arranged and/or attended by celebrities ($M = 1.76$), and advertising campaigns involving celebrities ($M = 1.79$). Personal and family relationships ($M = 4.45$) were the most important predictor of for whom a first-timer voted (see Table 2). In other words, subjective norms, or the expectation set forth by family and significant others, affected for whom a first-timer voted significantly more than celebrity events, $t(328) = 22.81, p < .01$, and celebrity advertising, $t(327) = 23.13, p < .01$. This supports our first hypothesis.

TABLE 1. Voting Behavior and Motivation by Political Party

	Republican	Democrat	Other
Percentage of sample voting for a given party	41	39	0.3
Main reason for voting	Responsibility/Duty	Felt strongly about the issues	N/A

TABLE 2. Influencing Agents on First-Time Voting Behavior

Influencing Agent	Overall Mean*	Republican		Democrat		P**
		M	SD	M	SD	
Community events arranged and/or attended by celebrities	1.76	1.71	1.26	1.64	1.47	0.116
Advertising campaigns containing celebrities	1.79	1.64	1.11	1.96	1.46	0.043
Personal and family relationships	4.45	4.90	1.76	4.10	2.02	0.001

*Items on seven-point scales where "1" = Low and "7" = High.

**P-values measure mean differences between Republicans and Democrats on the given variable.

Subsequent analyses revealed that Republicans ($M = 4.9$) were significantly more likely than Democrats ($M = 4.1$) to rely on family as a reference for voting preferences, $t(267) = 3.43, p < .001$ (see Table 2). Further, political advertising containing celebrity endorsers was generally not that influential for either party, however, in line with expectations, Democrats ($M = 1.96$) were more in favor of this strategy than Republicans ($M = 1.64$), $t(252) = 2.03, p < .05$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Whereas overall respondents were somewhat positive ($M = 4.25$) about the use of celebrities to encourage voter turnout, they were not as receptive to celebrity's attempts to sway voting toward (or against) a specific candidate ($M = 3.17$), $t(418) = 11.16, p < .01$. A closer look at this finding revealed that acceptance (or rejection) of celebrity attempts to influence voting may be a function (at least in the 2004 election) of partisan allegiance. First-time voters who were Democrats were significantly more favorable than first-time voters who were Republicans on the use of celebrities to encourage voter turnout, $t(292) = 2.24, p < .05$ and the selection of a specific candidate, $t(292) = 5.31, p < .01$ (see Table 3).

Recalling Names of Celebrities

Of the 506 survey respondents, 51% could recall the name of one celebrity who appeared in a political advertising campaign encouraging them to vote (in general), 34% could recall two, and 15% could recall three. These celebrities (in order of frequency of mention) fell into four distinct categories: entertainers, actors, politicians, and media figures.

TABLE 3. Attitude Towards Celebrity Involvement

	Overall Mean*	Republican		Democrat		P**
		M	SD	M	SD	
Liking of celebrities to encourage voter turnout	4.25	3.98	1.87	4.46	1.76	0.026
Liking of celebrities to garner votes for a specific candidate	3.17	2.61	1.77	3.76	1.93	0.000

*Items on seven-point scales where "1" = Low and "7" = High.

**P-values measure mean differences between Republicans and Democrats on the given variable.

Approximately 74 names of different celebrities were mentioned, the overwhelming majority of which were entertainers (e.g., P. Diddy) and actors (e.g., Ben Affleck).

Open-Ended Feedback

Although not requested, a large number of respondents provided anecdotal comments on their opinion of the marriage of celebrities and politics and the influence (or lack thereof) they had on their personal vote.

Those in favor of the relationship were often quick to point out that celebrities did not influence them directly, but rather served to reinforce their selection of a candidate:

Celebrities had no part in influencing who I was voting for, it just showed me who agreed with me.

None of them convinced me to vote for their candidate, but it made me happy that they were supporting the candidate I wanted to win.

Others were less than positive, often criticizing the qualifications or credibility of celebrities in the political arena:

I don't see the connection between popularity and intelligence on American issues.

If you need a celebrity to help you to vote then you should not be voting.

I don't listen to the crazy ramblings of celebrities who try to use their status to brainwash people.

Celebrities contribute nothing to society . . .

Some respondents even claimed that celebrity endorsement was counterproductive:

I thought if anything their endorsement gave me reason not to vote for that party.

I voted the opposite of what they told me. They are celebrities, not politicians.

Some of the celebrities and their endorsements caused me to vote opposite.

DISCUSSION

In line with our expectations, in terms of voting behavior, family and significant others were more influential than celebrities in engendering support for a political candidate. Participants indicated that community events and advertising involving celebrities were least likely to influence their decisions. At first glance, it would appear that the money and time invested in celebrity support is wasteful. However, before discounting the value of their involvement, further exploration is required.

The reason for lack of influence could be a result of a number of factors. First, an argument could be made that respondents were unwilling to admit the influence that celebrities wielded on their decision making. Numerous studies often fall prey to the social desirability bias when respondents offer answers that they perceive to be social desirable, refusing to admit that their decision was swayed by one or more celebrities. Given that this was an anonymous online survey, we believe the chances of this occurring are significantly less than if the survey was completed in person. Nevertheless, the possibility still exists.

Second, perhaps first-time voters do not study elections well enough to know which celebrity is speaking out and who the celebrity is endorsing. Our data indicate that first-timers were able to list one, two, and, at times, even three celebrities involved with the 2004 Election.

Third, it is possible that the celebrities utilized in the 2004 Election did not resonate well with respondents. It appears (from anecdotal comments) that at least some first-time voters felt that a number of celebrities lacked credibility and this potentially undermined their effectiveness as an endorser (e.g., "Ben Affleck has no idea what he is talking about," "I find it funny that a rapper [P. Diddy] was telling people to vote." Additional comments shed further light on the incongruence between celebrities and politicians to the point at which having a celebrity who is perceived as using star power to engender votes actually backfires completely (e.g., "I voted the opposite of what they told me," "Some of the celebrities and their endorsements caused me to vote opposite.").

Given the subjective nature of determining celebrity endorser credibility, it may be that celebrities are best served and more influential in motivating people to vote in general as opposed to tendering a vote toward a specific candidate. The strength of celebrities may be that they bring visibility to a campaign. Perhaps this is the extent of their influence and should be the limit of their involvement.

The difference in the drive to vote between the two parties is interesting. In our study, first-time Republicans tended to vote based on the fact

that they believe it is their duty as a citizen. First-time Democrats, on the other hand, claimed to vote because of the issues involved in the election. Unfortunately, very little literature exists on first-time voters and partisan ties, specifically that which addresses voting motivation. One study that offers some potential insight into this finding is a (nationally representative) survey of 14,698 voters completed by Stanford University in 2000 (Jackman 2000). Findings of this study suggest that Republican supporters had a greater understanding of the political process before the election than did Democratic supporters. A greater understanding of the political process could perhaps reflect a greater appreciation for the political process thereby resulting in a greater sense of duty. An additional finding of our study was that Republicans were more apt (than Democrats) to rely on family and friends as a reference for voting preferences. The role of the family in educating young voters about the political process (i.e., the election process) and instilling a sense of duty may have also contributed to this finding.

This study examined first-time undergraduate voters and therefore it may be argued that the sample is not representative of the U.S. (eligible) voting population. However, it is important to point out that, in the United States, voting participation tends to be skewed towards those with higher levels of education (i.e., those with a college education) (Jamieson, Shin, and Day 2002). Nonetheless, future studies should include all potential first-time voters to see if celebrity endorsement is more persuasive in less-educated segments of the first-time voting population.

Given that the focus of this study was to gauge the impact of celebrities in general as opposed to specific celebrities, future research should focus on the persuasiveness of individual celebrities and address issues such as the importance of attractiveness in selecting a celebrity to endorse a political candidate and whether there exists an appropriate and empirically measurable psychological or physical “match-up” between the celebrity and candidate which may exert a greater influence on attitude toward the candidate. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine the link between recall of a given celebrity, which candidate that celebrity endorsed, and for which candidate the first-timer voted. Additional research should also address partisan differences, specifically relating to motivation to vote and the role and influence of opinion leaders. This would build on Balance Theory which potentially plays an instrumental role in the psychological processes that are deeply entrenched in the effects of celebrity influence on first-time voting behavior.

CONCLUSION

Celebrity involvement in politics has grown with each campaign. Political parties welcome celebrity endorsements because they draw attention and financial support to their campaign. Celebrities willingly participate either because they believe they can make a difference or because they feel that it will, in some way, increase their own level of marketability. The debate still exists on just how influential these celebrities are and how they can motivate young people to vote. Findings of this study suggest that, despite the abundance of celebrity endorsements, subjective norms (i.e., for whom others close to the first-timer voted), continue to be a stronger predictor of first-time voting behavior. In the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election, celebrities may have looked pretty, but they were not particularly influential on first-time voters.

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