

Measuring The Effectiveness of Celebrity Activism: Celebrity Advocate v Celebrity Endorser

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Abstract

The influence of celebrities in politics has long been underestimated in political science and political communications disciplines. This research explores the effectiveness of two types of celebrity activism—celebrity advocacy and celebrity endorsements—to determine which type produces broader and more focused media coverage. Through case study analysis, this essay finds that although celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers generate similarly broad media coverage, celebrity advocates generate media coverage that is more focused on their cause. In addition, by taking into consideration celebrities' gender, race, and the political leaning of the cause advocated or endorsed by the celebrity, the research finds that all three variables also affect the breadth and the focus of the

media coverage, but more quantitative research is required to confirm a causal relationship. This research has important implications for governmental and non-governmental actors engaging with celebrity endorsers and celebrity advocates—while both are equally capable of generating broad media coverage, celebrity advocates are better suited to retaining the focus of the media coverage on the cause, and not themselves.

Introduction

In the US, not unlike in other countries, politics and celebrity culture have long been entwined, but never more than they are right now. Academics researching celebrity politics date the rise of celebrity involvement in politics to around 100 years ago when, in 1918, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was instructed to start maintaining close surveillance of suspected Hollywood radicals.¹ The US government could already see the impact celebrities could have on the country's political discourse and was immediately suspicious.

Over the last decade Anglo-Saxon celebrities' relationship with politics changed considerably. Before Barack Obama's 2012 campaign, celebrities were reluctant to get political, but in 2012 as a result of his star power, coupled with his liberal ideas and most importantly the rise of social media—which made communication that much easier for celebrities and regular citizens alike—celebrities' political activism exploded.² From a strategic communications perspective, technology has also allowed celebrities to craft and control their public image and messaging more effectively. With the ability to manage their own social media accounts and communicate directly with their audience, celebrities can shape the narrative around their activism and position themselves as leaders and advocates for specific causes. By the time of the watershed US presidential election of 2016, celebrities were regularly sharing their

1 Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 3–4.

2 Patrick Gavin, '[Celebs Get Political in 2012](#)', *Politico*, 5 November 2012.

political opinions and taking on political causes not only in the Global South, but also domestically.

In the post-President Donald Trump era, US celebrities are more than ever before vocal about politics; some even feel pressured to support or denounce certain politicians or political causes. In 2016 the pop singer Taylor Swift was criticised for not endorsing the presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, with some far-right activists going as far as suggesting her silence might mean she was one of them.³ By 2018 the pressure compounded, and Taylor Swift came out in support of the Democratic Party candidates in Tennessee. This led to a surge of 65,000 voter registrations in the 24 hours following the announcement,⁴ as well as criticism from the Republican Party for exerting undue influence on democratic processes.⁵ Taylor Swift's case embodies the state of celebrity politics in the US today—it is highly polarised, and highly impactful.

Despite the growing phenomenon of celebrity activism, celebrities' role remains an underexplored topic—some even question if it matters,⁶ i.e., if it influences policy. Although this article was unable to identify a single case where celebrity activism single-handedly resulted in domestic policy change—it would still argue that there are other measurable and valuable ways in which celebrities' activism influences politics. For example, Kim Kardashian secured clemency for Alice Marie Johnson⁷ and started a national conversation on prison reform, Oprah's endorsement of Barack Obama secured Obama nearly 1 million extra votes in the 2008 election,⁸ and advocacy and fundraising efforts by Eva Longoria

3 Jeff Jacoby, '[After Years of Pressure Celebrities Get Political](#)', *Boston Globe*, 12 October 2018.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 John Street, '[Do Celebrity Politics and Celebrity Politicians Matter?](#)', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 14 N° 3 (2012): 346–56.

7 '[Trump Pardons Alice Johnson, Whose Cause Was Backed by Kim Kardashian](#)', *Reuters*, 28 August 2020.

8 Andrew Pease and Paul R. Brewer, '[The Oprah Factor: The Effects of a Celebrity Endorsement in a Presidential Primary Campaign](#)', *International Journal of Press/Politics* 13 N° 4 (2008): 386–400.

and America Ferrera led to an increase in Latino politicians running for office in the US.⁹

Another reason why celebrities' influence on politics has not been explored in as much detail yet is the issue of framing it within the wider context of political science and political communication.¹⁰ Political scientists are highly critical and suspicious of celebrities' role in politics to the point of dismissing it altogether,¹¹ while political communication researchers accept it as a part of decentralised political communication. Both see it as part of a broader personalisation of politics trend¹² as well as a collapse of trust in the political classes¹³ in the context of late modernity.¹⁴

The personalisation of politics trend refers to politicians using their personal brand and image as a political asset and incorporating elements of their personality—values and personal experiences—into their media profile. Antkowiak and Schefs link this trend to the rise of mass media, which forces politicians to partake in media performance, where their personality is sought after as much as, if not more than, their policy stance or political track record.¹⁵ The personalisation of politics trend creates favourable conditions for celebrities to have an ever-growing role in politics because they are better able to partake in media performance than career politicians. As Street put it, 'either politicians learn the skills of the medium or those already skilled in it (the celebrity) come to dominate it'.¹⁶

9 Bethonie Butler, 'If You Don't Know Why Eva Longoria Is a Political Power Broker, You Haven't Been Paying Attention', *Washington Post*, 20 October 2020.

10 Street, 'Do Celebrity Politics'.

11 Ibid.

12 Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), p. 9.

13 Ibid., p. 139.

14 Street, 'Do Celebrity Politics'.

15 Paweł Antkowiak and Łukasz Schefs, 'The Personalisation of Politics at the Local Level in Poland and Selected Central and Eastern European States: A Contribution to the Research', *Politics in Central Europe* 11 N° 2 (2015): 95–108.

16 John Street, 'Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6 N° 4 (2004): 435–52.

The personalisation of politics trend stems from the collapse of trust in the political classes.¹⁷ According to Pew Research, Americans' trust in government has been on a downwards trend since the 1960s. Back in 1958, when the National Election Study started asking respondents about trust in government, 73 per cent of Americans trusted their government. In 2021 that figure stood at just 24 per cent. Political scientists such as Marsh attribute this decline in trust to the period of late modernity, where hierarchies have been replaced with networks and the state has been hollowed out¹⁸—the power has shifted upwards to international organisations, downwards to non-governmental organisations, and sideways to transnational corporations and other non-state actors, including celebrities. Not all hierarchies have been replaced, however; the remaining ones have been rebuilt along more horizontal lines, which has given rise to the emergence of new forms of power and influence. This has led to the thinning of the traditional political community and contributed to the dissolution of communitarian agreements,¹⁹ leading to a decline in trust in government.

The trust vacuum created by the declining trust in politicians has been quickly filled with growing trust in the private sector. According to the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer, business is the most trusted institution in the US.²⁰ That year business also became the only institution that is perceived as both competent and ethical.²¹ Although the Edelman Trust Barometer does not include celebrities, existing research indicates that people consider celebrities to be more trustworthy than politicians.²² Researchers suggest that the reason celebrities appear more trustworthy than politicians is that they seem familiar due to their constant media presence.²³

17 Antkowiak and Schefs, 'Personalisation of Politics'.

18 David Marsh, 'Late Modernity and the Changing Nature of Politics: Two Cheers for Henrik Bang', *Critical Policy Studies* 5 N° 1 (2011): 73–89.

19 Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy* 6 N° 1 (1995): 65–78.

20 Edelman, *Edelman Trust Barometer 2021*.

21 Ibid.

22 Craig Frizzell, 'Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Effects of Celebrity Endorsements', *Social Science Journal* 48 N° 2 (2011): 314–23.

23 Jessica Grose, 'When Did We Start Taking Famous People Seriously?', *New York Times*, 20 April 2020.

The central question this article will aim to answer is, in a society where celebrity politics have become commonplace, which of the two most common types of celebrity activism is more effective—celebrity endorser or celebrity advocate? Celebrity advocates are in control of their agency—they can proactively choose the causes they want to advocate for, and they can define their own messaging and their advocacy style. Celebrity endorsers, on the other hand, are often used by others—politicians, political parties, NGOs—to promote or endorse their cause.

This article hypothesises that the type of celebrity activism affects both the breadth and the focus of the media coverage—the two proxies for effectiveness. Although the article’s focus will be on comparing celebrity endorsers with celebrity advocates, it will take into consideration celebrities’ identity—gender, race, and the political leaning of their cause in its selection of case studies and analysis. By answering this research question, it will contribute to closing the research gap assessing the effectiveness of the two most common types of celebrity activism.

To answer the central question, I shall rely on a case study analysis of eight celebrities taking on celebrity endorser or celebrity advocate roles. Namely:

- Kim Kardashian advocating for clemency for Alice Mary Johnson
- Colin Kaepernick advocating for the abolition of the police
- Diamond and Silk advocating for a bill to defund sanctuary cities
- Kelsey Grammer advocating for Marsy’s law
- Olivia Rodrigo endorsing President Biden’s youth vaccination plan
- Lil Wayne endorsing President Trump’s ‘Platinum Plan’ for Black Americans
- Jeff Goldblum endorsing a bill that would reduce the use of single-use plastics in California

- Kirstie Alley endorsing President Trump in the Presidential elections in 2020.

I shall limit its scope to US national politics only and not investigate the celebrities' role in international advocacy and fundraising efforts, which is a lot better researched. Geographically, the scope of this research will be limited to the United States due to the widespread phenomenon of celebrity activism in the country.

Literature Review

The explosion of academic literature on the topic of celebrity politics coincided with the rise of the 24-hour news cycle and the democratisation of the media. Wheeler dates the roots of scholarship on the subject to the mid twentieth century when an American sociologist, Leo Lowenthal, argued that 'idols of production', politicians, had been replaced with 'idols of consumption', celebrities.²⁴ Duncombe argues that celebrities in democratic societies are acceptable because they are simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary.²⁵ On the one hand, 'they are just like us', in that a lot of them have humble beginnings, but at the same time they are extraordinary—the reason they have become famous is their exemplary talent.²⁶ This essay would like to offer an alternative theory—celebrity politics are acceptable because for the most part they have been focused outward, predominantly on the Global South. Celebrities have long lobbied, fundraised, and advocated for humanitarian causes outside the domestic political discourse.²⁷

Since the 2010s, however, some celebrities' focus had shifted inward. This essay attributes this inward shift to the growing polarisation as

24 Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, p. 9.

25 Ibid.

26 Lisa Ann Richey and Alexandra Budabin, '[Celebrities in International Affairs](#)', *Oxford Handbooks Online*, July 2016.

27 bid.

well as a shifting political discourse that no longer glosses over societal fissures, such as racism, sexism, or income inequality.

Due to the polarisation of societies, including the US, that shift was not welcomed by the opposing sides of the causes that celebrities have taken on. Colin Kaepernick lost his NFL career for taking a stance against police brutality and racial inequality in the US. Others lost their fans, brand deals, and social media followers for their political activities.²⁸ By comparing the effectiveness of the different types of celebrity activism in the context of US domestic politics, this article will inject some evidence-based insights into a highly polarised debate.

As Marsh et al. have observed, the bulk of academic research on celebrity politics to date has focused on either classifying the different types of celebrity involvement in politics or assessing the effects of celebrity politics on democracy.²⁹ Most of the research into the effects is highly theoretical and critical of celebrities' role. Celebrities' role in politics has long been criticised by left-leaning authors, such as Chris Rojek, who see celebrities as agents of the neoliberal system, perpetuating its values and the reward culture in which one can be distinguished through financial or social status.³⁰

Others' criticism has been more practical and centred on celebrities' lack of political substance and their emotive rather than rational responses.³¹ In the US specifically, the public discourse around celebrities' involvement in politics has been criticised for unfairly favouring left-wing politics and causes.³² This trend might transcend the Western world because

28 Adam Jude, 'How Colin Kaepernick Inspired Activism, Awareness and Seattle Athletes to Speak out against Racial Injustice', *Seattle Times*, 27 August 2020.

29 David Marsh, Paul 't Hart, and Karen Tindall, 'Celebrity Politics: The Politics of the Late Modernity?', *Political Studies Review* 8 N° 3 (2010): 322–40.

30 Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 198.

31 Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, p. 141.

32 Nahuel Ribke, 'Entertainment Industries and "Liberal" Celebrities: The Failure to Convert Attention into Political Power', *A Genre Approach to Celebrity Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 117–33.

celebrity politics research from South Korea presents empirical evidence of politically influential celebrities' being more left-leaning.³³

Ross's analysis, however, challenges this claim. In his book *Hollywood Left and Right* he demonstrates that although left-leaning celebrities may have been able to secure more media coverage that made the issue more visible, it is right-leaning celebrities that were more likely to seek, win, and exercise electoral power.³⁴ This adds another dimension to the research. The case study analysis will therefore look to compare the media coverage associated with right- and left-leaning causes taken up by celebrities.

Apart from criticism, some micro studies have been published by academics assessing the effectiveness of individual celebrities, but no work has been done comparing the different types of celebrity activism and its effects. Since most of the existing research on celebrity politics has focused on forming typologies, numerous classifications have been established with varying scopes. Marsh et al. name two types of classification in celebrity politics—one that focuses on the origins of the celebrities and another that focuses on celebrities' political action.³⁵ West and Orman laid the groundwork for the former by distinguishing between celebrity politicians who are (i) political celebrities; (ii) legacies who owe their popularity to their political families; (iii) celebrities turned politicians; and (iv) overnight celebrities who gain this position through an event, often as a victim or a witness.³⁶ Street only distinguishes between a celebrity politician (a celebrity that becomes a political figure, such as Donald Trump) and a political celebrity—a celebrity who uses their status to influence politics, such as Bono.³⁷ Mukherjee builds on Street's work and adds another type of celebrity politician—a celebrity endorser who promotes certain causes or policies.³⁸

33 Sungjin Park et al., 'The Network of Celebrity Politics', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 659 N° 1 (2015): 246–58.

34 Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, p. 4.

35 Marsh et al., 'Celebrity Politics'.

36 D. West and J. Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 2003), pp. 19–23.

37 Street, 'Celebrity Politicians'.

38 Marsh et al., 'Celebrity Politics'.

On the other side of the spectrum, Hart and Tindall shift their attention to celebrities' political action. They offer a typology of four distinct political celebrities: (i) celebrity advocate; (ii) celebrity endorser; (iii) celebrity politician; and (iv) politician turned celebrity.³⁹ They distinguish between a celebrity advocate and a celebrity endorser by defining an advocate as a celebrity who proactively lobbies for a cause, as opposed to endorsers, who pay lip service to a cause, organisation, or an individual, but do not necessarily engage in long-term advocacy for a specific policy change.⁴⁰

This article challenges the existing typology for missing an important dimension—the agency of the celebrity. By analysing celebrity politics through a political communication lens that sees celebrities as information conduits,⁴¹ celebrities' agency is omitted from the typology. Instead, researchers focus on their actions or the origin of their fame, while their ability to make creative or communicative choices is not considered. This misses the biggest difference between celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers—celebrity advocates are proactive and can therefore make more independent choices when it comes to their activism, while celebrity endorsers, who usually become endorsers at someone's request, are more constrained, and their agency is more limited.

For the purposes this article, the research will compare the two most common types of celebrity activism—celebrity advocacy and celebrity endorsement. I adopt Hart and Tindall's foundational definition of the two, but will further distinguish the two according to their agency. Celebrity advocates are in control of their agency—they can proactively choose the causes they want to advocate for, and they can define their own messaging and their advocacy style. Celebrity endorsers, on the other hand, are often (not always) used by others—politicians, political parties, NGOs—to promote or endorse their cause. As a result, they are more constrained when it comes to messaging, and other activities associated with their endorsement. I shall investigate to what extent (if at all) that affects their reach and the focus of media coverage.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics*, p. 29.

Despite the prevalence of celebrity endorsers in politics, in the field of political communication and political science, celebrity endorsers have only been researched in the context of endorsing NGOs and certain candidates in elections. Wymer and Drollinger found that celebrities' personal qualities can affect the effectiveness of their charity endorsement, and celebrity qualities such as expertise and admirability are significant predictors of audience donation intentions.⁴² Von Sikorski et al. found that negative press associated with the celebrity endorser can negatively affect the endorsed political candidate.⁴³

Survey data from 2019 confirms the findings of Sikorski et al., and further argues that celebrities' endorsements not only do not have a bearing on the vast majority's voting behaviour, but even put some off voting for certain candidates if they had been endorsed by a celebrity. The survey found that 65 per cent of Americans said that celebrities' endorsement had no bearing on their decision, 11 per cent said that they were more likely to vote for someone who was endorsed by a celebrity, and 24 per cent said that a celebrity endorsement would make them less likely to vote for the endorsed candidate.⁴⁴

The key tenet of the existing scholarship on celebrity advocates is the conclusion numerous academics have reached that when celebrities get involved in politics, they bring more attention to themselves than they do to the cause or issue they are endorsing or advocating for.⁴⁵ This is illustrated by Jensen, who analysed Kim Kardashian's criminal justice reform efforts.

Jensen concludes that the media coverage of Kim Kardashian's efforts had two major implications. First, it shifted the focus to celebrity and

42 Walter Wymer and Tanya Drollinger, 'Charity Appeals Using Celebrity Endorsers: Celebrity Attributes Most Predictive of Audience Donation Intentions', *Voluntas* 26 (2015): 2694–717.

43 Christian von Sikorski, Johannes Knoll, and Jörg Matthes, 'A New Look at Celebrity Endorsements in Politics: Investigating the Impact of Scandalous Celebrity Endorsers and Politicians' Best Responses', *Media Psychology* 21 N° 3 (2018): 403–36.

44 Gene Del Vecchio, 'Dear Celebrities, Research Shows That Your Political Opinions Hurt Your Cause More than Help It', *Forbes*, 25 June 2020.

45 Courtney Jensen, 'Celebrity Everyday Maker: Public Policy and the Discourse of Celebrity Surrounding Kim Kardashian', *Public Integrity* 23 N° 3 (2021): 269–80.

away from the substance; second, the coverage emphasised individual engagement rather than collective political action.⁴⁶ While this essay agrees with the second assertion, Jensen's first assertion misses the point entirely. The media outlets that cover celebrity activism stories and do not provide sufficient coverage to the cause are not the type of outlets that would normally cover political issues.

The criminal justice issue Kim Kardashian took on never had the 'focus' that could be shifted elsewhere—the type of media that covered the issue once Kim Kardashian took it on had never covered it before. In her analysis, Jensen cites articles in *Vogue* and a celebrity activism news magazine called *Mary Sue*, among others. Neither publication has a track record in covering the issue of criminal justice reform outside the celebrity context. Before publishing Kim Kardashian's profile, *Vogue* only ever touched upon the issue of criminal justice reform when the outlet was profiling other celebrities who had made statements on the issue. The same is true for *Mary Sue* (themarysue.com): only nineteen articles on its website contained the words 'criminal justice reform',⁴⁷ and all nineteen were associated with celebrities' statements or actions on the subject. In essence, although celebrities taking on policy causes draw more attention to themselves than to the policy, the attention the policy receives with the celebrity backing is often sufficient for policy change to occur or public awareness levels to skyrocket.⁴⁸

Beyond individual celebrity case studies, Thrall et al. conducted some aggregate research looking at 165 celebrities involved in environmental advocacy campaigns. They found that the media coverage of celebrity activism on the subject was not preceded by increased coverage of environmental issues overall.⁴⁹ They argue that this indicates that the role of celebrities in politics has been overestimated. This article would disagree with this interpretation of their findings. The long-term media

46 Ibid.

47 Search for 'criminal justice reform', *The Mary Sue* [accessed 25 August 2021].

48 Mark Harvey, *Celebrity Influence: Politics, Persuasion, and Issue-Based Advocacy* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), pp. 14–18.

49 Marsh et al., 'Celebrity Politics'.

coverage of a topic is not an appropriate measure for success in celebrity politics. Most celebrities' activism aims to either affect policy change or increase awareness that could then lead to increased public pressure, and because of it—policy change. It is, therefore, more fitting to look at either policy change or the media coverage of the issue that resulted in the celebrities' involvement. Here, the latter will be used because policy change cannot be attributed to a single actor in a networked policy environment.

Another important finding of celebrity and politics literature is that although the quality of attention celebrities' causes gets might be debatable, its quantity far exceeds the media coverage of any politician. In his book *Celebrity Influence: Politics, Persuasion, and Issue-Based Advocacy*, Mark Harvey compares the coverage of celebrities' pet projects with the coverage of politicians' key public policy positions. His research found that celebrities were more effective at earning their causes media attention than either the sitting US president or members of Congress from 1999 to 2012.⁵⁰ This, however, should be qualified, because Thrall et al. found that the coverage of celebrities' political activism is linked to the level of their fame, i.e., A-list celebrities get more media coverage of their political engagement than do less popular celebrities.⁵¹

Hart and Tindall's research suggests that it is not just the level of fame that affects media coverage, but other qualities of celebrities' stardom, such as meritocracy of their fame, the prestige of their field, the endurance of their fame, and the breadth and width of their fame, are all positively correlated to the perceived significance of their political activities.⁵² This article will contribute to this area of research by determining if the type of celebrity activism, be it endorsement or advocacy, also affects the type of coverage celebrities receive.

There is a gap in the literature looking at the difference in media coverage (if any) associated with celebrities' gender and race. There is some research

50 Harvey, *Celebrity Influence*, pp. 14–18.

51 Marsh et al., 'Celebrity Politics'.

52 Ibid.

on how the political activism of Black celebrities in the US has been covered by the media, including the seminal work of Sarah J. Jackson, who found that Black celebrities' activism is more often sensationalised, but framed in a way that detracts from their cause.⁵³ There is even less literature on how celebrities' gender affects the media coverage of their activism. Van Zoonen, for example, argues the term 'celebrity' is gendered because public visibility strongly favours men over women,⁵⁴ but her findings are not backed up by empirical data.

Theoretical Framework

As was established in the previous section, there is no existing theoretical framework to measure the effectiveness of celebrity activism,⁵⁵ and celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers have not been compared before. Different researchers have attempted to assess celebrity activism by analysing the policy effects⁵⁶ or conducting discourse analysis of individual case studies.⁵⁷ Neither, however, yielded the desired results. The nature of discourse analysis does not produce a replicable framework for multiple case studies, while policy analysis does not align with the nature of celebrity activism. Celebrity activism is a highly performative act of political participation designed for mass media consumption. The goal of celebrity activism is rarely direct policy change; more often it is awareness-raising that could then lead to policy change.⁵⁸ Also, policy-making in late modernity is a highly networked endeavour⁵⁹—no policy change can be attributed to a single individual; therefore, policy effects analysis is an imperfect way of assessing the effectiveness of celebrity activists.

53 Sarah J. Jackson, *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press Framing Dissent* (Oxford, UK: Routledge, 2014).

54 Liesbet van Zoonen, 'The Personal, the Political and the Popular', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 N° 3 (2006): 287–301.

55 Asteris Huliaras and Nikolaos Tzifakis, 'Celebrity Activism in International Relations: In Search of a Framework for Analysis', *Global Society* 24 N° 2 (2010): 255–74.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Street, 'Do Celebrity Politics'.

To overcome it, this article will instead create an original criterion for effective celebrity activism based on what academics have established to be qualities of *ineffective* celebrity activism and take into account the media-centric nature of celebrity activism. Jensen in her analysis of the discourse around Kim Kardashian's prison reform efforts found that her campaigning was ineffective because it shifted the focus from the cause for which she was advocating to herself. This is a broadly accepted criterion for ineffective celebrity activism used also by Wheeler⁶⁰ and West.⁶¹ Effective celebrity activism, would, therefore, place the focus of media coverage back on the cause. Another criterion for ineffective celebrity activism is set out by Jackson⁶² and Ross.⁶³ In separate studies, they both used the lack of visibility—the limited reach of celebrities' activism—to conclude that certain celebrities' activism was less effective than others'. The second criterion will therefore be the visibility of activism.

Both criteria—the focus on the cause and the visibility of the effort—relate to the media coverage of celebrity activism. The most appropriate unit of analysis is, therefore, individual media articles. The media is the most appropriate lens through which one can analyse the phenomenon of celebrities and celebrity politics because celebrities themselves only exist in media storytelling—if they were not talked about, they would not be celebrities, i.e., they would no longer be well known. That is not to say celebrities cannot control or have no agency over their coverage in the media—including the framing of themselves and their political activism—but that control is not total.

Social media engagement is another valuable facet of the media that could add a layer of depth to investigation, as most political activism takes place on social media platforms. However, celebrities' participation in multiple social networks makes it considerably harder to compare metrics from different social media platforms. Other metrics, such as

60 Mark Wheeler, 'Celebrity Diplomacy', in *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr, and Paul Sharp (eds), (London, UK : SAGE Publications, 2016), pp. 530–39.

61 Darrell M. West, 'Angelina, Mia, and Bono: Celebrities and International Development', *Brookings* [accessed 25 August 2021].

62 Jackson, *Black Celebrity*, pp. 10–12.

63 Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, pp. 19–21.

engagement with political actions (e.g. signing petitions, political debate, fundraising), are also too different to provide a uniform metric across all case studies.

Methodology

Eight case studies of celebrities' activism will be analysed—four celebrity endorsers and four celebrity advocates. Purposeful sampling will be used to identify the eight case studies⁶⁴ that match a pre-existing criterion, namely that four case studies must be about celebrity endorsers and four about celebrity advocates. To account for any gender- and race-related biases that could affect the media coverage,⁶⁵ the case studies will include two white male celebrities, two white female celebrities, two non-white male celebrities, and two non-white female celebrities—one of each for the two types of celebrity activism. A distinction will be made between celebrities advocating for left-leaning and right-leaning causes to account for political differences that might affect the media coverage. To take this into consideration, four case studies will focus on celebrities taking on left-leaning causes and the other four on right-leaning issues. All eight case studies will be geographically limited to the US.

For each case study, ten top-ranking media articles in a neutral Google search (non-personalised, non-location-based) will be analysed. A neutral Google search was chosen to replicate the experience of an average reader and analyse the same articles that most readers would have been recommended if they searched for information about each case study. The Google search results are limited to a three-month period for each case study to yield comparable datasets.

The two criteria that will be used to assess the media coverage will be the focus and the visibility of the top ten media articles per case

64 Lawrence A. Palinkas et al., 'Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research', *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42 N° 5 (2015): 533–44.

65 Jackson, *Black Celebrity*, pp. 14–16.

study. The focus will be measured by determining what percentage of the article focused on the cause taken on by the celebrity. This will be measured by counting the words in sentences focusing on the cause and the words in sentences focusing on other topics. The research will also account for what those other topics are. To contextualise each article, it will also determine the overarching narrative of each media article in regard to the celebrity activists, i.e., how they are portrayed, or if they are discredited or presented as credible. This will help determine if their personal qualities or behaviour outside their identity attributes might affect the coverage of their activism.

The visibility of the top ten media articles will be measured by proxy of the average monthly audience of the outlets where the articles are published. The audience figures are found on [similarweb](#), an online digital analytics platform that shows average monthly audience data for media outlets with at least 50,000 monthly visitors.

The celebrity advocacy case studies are shown in Table 1.

	Female	Male
White	ADVOCATE, left-leaning: Kim Kardashian	ADVOCATE, right-leaning: Kelsey Grammer
White	ENDORSER, right-leaning: Kirstie Alley	ENDORSER, left-leaning: Jeff Goldblum
Non-white	ADVOCATE, right-leaning: Diamond and Silk	ENDORSER, right-leaning: Lil Wayne
Non-white	ENDORSER, left-leaning: Olivia Rodrigo	ADVOCATE, left-leaning: Colin Kaepernick

Table 1. A list of the case studies and criteria by gender, race, political leaning of the cause, and the type of activism

My analysis examines the breadth and the focus of the coverage across the eight case studies to compare the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers and advocates. In addition to comparing the effectiveness of celebrity

endorsers and celebrity advocates, it will also seek to determine if race, gender, and the political leaning of the cause the celebrity endorsed or advocated for affects the visibility and the focus of the media coverage.

Case Studies

Kim Kardashian

The case study of media personality Kim Kardashian revolves around Kardashian's efforts to win clemency for Alice Marie Johnson, a first-time offender who was sentenced to life in prison for a drug offence in 1996.⁶⁶ Kim Kardashian used her personal lawyer and a team of legal experts to win her clemency. At the end of May 2018, Kim Kardashian West met with President Trump to personally advocate for Johnson's pardon. Following the meeting, President Trump granted clemency to Johnson. The keywords used to identify relevant articles were 'kim kardashian alice marie johnson' and the search limits were 15 March to 15 May 2018.

Overall, Kim Kardashian West's campaign to win Alice Marie Johnson clemency was highly successful—the coverage was broad (the top ten outlets had a combined audience of 1.1 billion readers) and focused on the facts of Johnson's case. The top ten Google Search articles on the case study all covered Johnson's case thoroughly, providing background to her arrest, listing mitigating circumstances, and highlighting her achievements in prison.

Around 84 per cent of the total coverage the case received in the ten articles analysed was dedicated to Johnson and her efforts to gain clemency, not Kim Kardashian or her celebrity. Some articles were so dedicated to covering Johnson's story that they failed to mention Kim Kardashian, although her name was featured in the headline and imagery. This would suggest that while Kim Kardashian brought a spotlight to the

66 'Everything You Need to Know about the Black Woman Kim Kardashian Is Trying to Get Released from Prison', *NewsOne*, 30 May 2018.

story, the media outlets that covered it focused their coverage on Johnson's case rather than Kim Kardashian's celebrity. The articles framed Kim Kardashian as an effective advocate for Johnson who was negotiating as an equal with White House officials for Johnson's clemency. The articles analysed did not attempt to undermine Kardashian's reputation by questioning her qualifications or the origin of her fame.

Colin Kaepernick

Former NFL player Colin Kaepernick has long advocated against police brutality and institutional racism. In autumn 2020 Kaepernick published an essay⁶⁷ advocating for the abolition of the police. It was a response to a pandemic of police violence against Black communities and Breonna Taylor's and George Floyd's murders by police officers.

Because it was published in October 2020, the timeline for data collection was 1 September to 1 December 2020. The keywords used were 'kaepernick police abolition'.

Despite the high visibility of Kaepernick's efforts—the combined audience of the top ten articles had a reach of 1 billion—only 48.5 per cent of the total coverage the case study received in the ten articles analysed was dedicated to Kaepernick's cause and arguments discussed in his essay.

Overall, Kaepernick's advocacy received highly polarised framing. In liberal, left-leaning media, Kaepernick was hailed as a thought leader in the anti-police brutality and Black Lives Matter movement. Meanwhile, the conservative, right-wing media framed him as a proponent of Marxist ideology who was injecting the public discourse with poisonous anti-police narratives and putting the lives of police officers at risk. Negative descriptions of Kaepernick in conservative media included offensive language and some racist tropes: 'one of the few unemployed people in

67 Colin Kaepernick, '[The Demand for Abolition](#)', *LEVEL*, 6 October 2020.

Trump's America';⁶⁸ 'messiah of the militants';⁶⁹ 'inarticulate failure [...] who has never delivered an eloquent speech'.⁷⁰

Diamond and Silk

Sisters Lynnette Hardaway and Rochelle Richardson, better known for their stage names Diamond and Silk, are political social media influencers who regularly produce YouTube content mocking the Democrats and promoting the GOP.⁷¹ In June 2019 Congressman Steve King announced a bill informally known as the 'Diamond and Silk Act 2019' because the pair advocated for the bill, and conversations with them inspired the congressman to draft it.⁷² The bill aimed to take federal funding away from 'sanctuary cities'—cities that limit their cooperation with the national authorities on matters of immigration enforcement—and redirect that funding towards veterans and the homeless. The Google Search limits for this case study were 1 May to 1 August 2019, and the keywords used were 'diamond and silk steve king'.

The sources of the top ten articles had a total reach of nearly 1 billion readers, but on average only around 22 per cent of the coverage was focused on the bill. The rest of the coverage cantered around Rep. King's history of racist behaviour and statements, his previous collaboration with Diamond and Silk, and the bill's lacklustre chances in the Democrat-controlled Congress. The articles also covered the press conference which was the main source of the media material, including the imagery. Instead of focusing on the bill, the coverage of the press conference centred on the behaviour of the participants—Rep. King and Diamond

68 C. Brito, 'Colin Kaepernick Calls for Abolishing Police and Prisons in New Essay', *CBS News*, 8 October 2020.

69 A. Raskin, 'Kaepernick Calls for Abolishment of "White Supremacist" Police', *Daily Mail*, 24 September 2020.

70 Ibid.

71 Zak Cheney-Rice, 'Steve King, Diamond, and Silk Deflect Racism Charges by Unveiling Racist Legislation', *Intelligencer*, 13 June 2019.

72 Griffin Connolly, 'Rep. King's "Diamond and Silk Act" Gets Ripped by Conservative Pundits', *Roll Call*, 13 December 2019.

and Silk—and statements unrelated to the bill. Some of the descriptors used to describe the two creators had racist overtones: for example, ‘two sinister chocolate-skinned sisters of doom’.⁷³ The narratives portrayed the two Black creators as shields used by Rep. King against allegations of racism. The focus was, therefore, not on Diamond and Silk, but on Rep. King.

Kelsey Grammer

In 2018 *Frasier* star Kelsey Grammer began advocating for the so-called Marsy’s law—a victims’ rights amendment that would give them the right to take part in public proceedings and reasonable protection from the accused, and to refuse discovery requests made by the accused.⁷⁴ To advocate for the law in various US states considering it, Grammer starred in an advertisement urging voters to support it.

Although the law was criticised by civil liberties organisations, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Grammer is an ardent supporter of victims’ rights legislation, including Marsy’s law. His support comes from personal experience—his father was gunned down at the age of thirty-eight and his sister was raped and murdered when she was eighteen.⁷⁵ For the purposes of this article, Grammer’s advocacy for the law was limited to September to December 2018 when he advocated in advance of crime amendment referendums in North Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Florida, Oklahoma, and Nevada, and the Google Search keywords were ‘kelsey grammer marsy’s law’.

The top ten outlets covering the story only had a reach of around 190 million readers, which is about one-fifth of the size of the other case studies. Despite the limited reach, on average 94 per cent of the coverage was firmly focused on Marsy’s law. The coverage outside the issue was

73 Wonderbitch, ‘[Steve King Built a Wall](#)’, *Wonkette*, 13 June 2019.

74 Katie Meyer, ‘[Marsy’s Law Explained](#)’, *WTF*, 5 November 2019.

75 Emily Birnbaum, ‘[Kelsey Grammer Invokes Family Tragedies in Crime Victims Amendments Ad](#)’, *The Hill*, 22 October 2018.

focused on Grammer's personal story, specifically his father's and his sister's murders, and that he only found out that his father's killer was released on bail through a tabloid because there was no legal provision stipulating that the victims should be notified of such developments. The narratives focused on Grammer's credibility as a celebrity advocating for Marsy's law because of his own experience.

Olivia Rodrigo

Singer Olivia Rodrigo used her newly found fame to become a spokesperson for the White House's COVID-19 vaccination plan for youths.⁷⁶ In July 2021 she visited the White House and met with President Joe Biden and Dr Anthony Fauci, and endorsed the vaccine for youth unequivocally.⁷⁷ The keywords used to identify relevant articles were 'olivia rodrigo vaccine'. The search limits were 15 May to 15 August 2021. This period was selected to cover Rodrigo's visit to the White House and the endorsement of the vaccines for young people.

Olivia Rodrigo's campaign was more visible than Kim Kardashian's—the total combined audience of the top ten articles was 1.6 billion—but the focus of the story was more blurred: only 56 per cent of the articles focused on youth vaccination and its benefits. Of the ten articles, four focused their attention on the practice of governments using celebrities to promote policies, rather than Olivia Rodrigo's endorsement of the vaccines. Other outlets shifted their focus to the origin of Rodrigo's celebrity or to the backlash from Republican lawmakers protesting against teen vaccination.⁷⁸

76 Kate Nakamura, 'Olivia Rodrigo Wants You to Get Vaccinated', *Global Citizen*, 15 July 2021.

77 Ibid.

78 F. Sonmez and P. Firozi, 'Singer Olivia Rodrigo Emphasizes "the Importance of Youth Vaccination"', *Washington Post*, 14 July 2021.

Lil Wayne

US rapper Lil Wayne endorsed President Trump's 'Platinum Plan' for Black Americans days before the 2020 presidential election. The \$ 500 billion plan was a part of Donald Trump's re-election campaign aimed at Black voters; it pledged to grant access to capital, to create 3 million new jobs, and to address racial disparities in education and healthcare.⁷⁹ The plan was criticised by US policy analysts for lacking details and repeating many of the mistakes made by previous administrations' attempts to help African American communities.⁸⁰ Wayne announced his endorsement in a tweet on 29 October 2020. The Google Search limits, therefore, were 15 September to 15 December 2020. The keywords used were 'lil wayne platinum plan'.

Wayne's endorsement did not receive a lot of media attention from major media outlets. The total reach of the top ten outlets covering the story was 511 million readers, about half the size of the other case studies. Around half of the media outlets could be described as conservative or fringe, indicating that the story attracted less mainstream media attention.

Only 38.5 per cent of the coverage from the top ten media outlets covered either the endorsement or the Platinum Plan. A lot of the coverage of Lil Wayne's endorsement focused on another rapper—Ice Cube's collaboration with the Trump administration to incorporate Ice Cube's vision for Black America into the Platinum Plan.

In at least half of the articles in the top ten list, the focus was on Ice Cube's work with the Trump administration, not Wayne's endorsement of the Platinum Plan. Articles that did put the focus on Lil Wayne were all rather short⁸¹—quoting Wayne's tweet in which he announced his support for the Platinum Plan and adding no more than three or four sentences to contextualise it. Some outlets contextualised Wayne's endorsement with his previous controversial statements on racism.

79 Kriston Capps, 'What's in Trump's "Platinum Plan" for Black America?', *Bloomberg.com*, 29 September 2020.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid. See 'Lil Wayne Meets With Donald Trump, Supports His Platinum Plan', *VladTV*, 29 October 2020.

Newsweek, for example, cited his arrest and an eight-month sentence at Rikers Island prison;⁸² neither the arrest nor the sentence was related to Wayne's endorsement.

Jeff Goldblum

In January 2020 actor Jeff Goldblum endorsed two bills in California's Senate and Assembly that would require companies to reduce single-use packaging by 2024 and ensure that products imported or made in California were recyclable or biodegradable.⁸³ As part of his endorsement of the bill, Goldblum met with lawmakers at the California Capitol.⁸⁴ The keywords used to discover the stories were 'jeff goldblum single-use plastics' and the search period limits were 1 December 2019 to 1 March 2020.

Overall, the top ten sources had a total reach of 131 million readers, which is significantly less than the other case studies. Like Grammer's case study, the coverage of Goldblum's endorsement was highly focused on the two bills. On average, 94 per cent of all coverage was about the two bills. The remaining 6 per cent placed attention on the source of Goldblum's fame, and his personal habits when it comes to single-use plastics. Unlike with the other case studies, a lot of the media outlets in the top ten articles analysed used the same AP news story, indicating a low interest in the endorsement. This led to at least five identical articles in the list of ten. The overarching narrative was that Goldblum lent his celebrity status to advocate for a progressive law.

82 Jeffery Martin, 'Lil Wayne Has "Great" Meeting with Donald Trump, Says His Platinum Plan Will Give Community "Real Ownership"', *Newsweek*, 30 October 2020.

83 'Celebrities Back California Bill to Cut Single-Use Plastics', *KPBS Public Media*, 23 January 2020.

84 Cuneyt Dil, 'Celebrities Back California Bill to Cut Single-Use Plastics', *AP*, 23 January 2020.

Kirstie Alley

Actress Kirstie Alley announced her second endorsement for Trump in October 2020, less than a month before the presidential election. In her endorsement, posted on Twitter, she said, 'I'm voting for @realDonaldTrump because he's NOT a politician. I voted for him 4 years ago for this reason and shall vote for him again for this reason.'⁸⁵ The search terms for this case study were 'kirstie alley trump endorsement' and the search limits were 1 September to 1 December 2020.

The top ten sources had a total reach of 808 million readers. Despite the broad reach, the coverage of Alley's endorsement focused almost exclusively on the backlash that it had caused—not President Trump's agenda or the presidential campaign. Only 7.5 per cent of the coverage focused on the endorsement—most of that was made up of verbatim quotes of Alley's tweet endorsing the president. The remainder of all articles placed the focus on the backlash the endorsement received from other celebrities, especially Alley's former co-stars and the general public. Out of the ten articles analysed, six referred to Alley's affiliation with the Church of Scientology, which is not directly relevant to the endorsement, but probably to undermine her credibility. The overarching narrative was that Alley's endorsement caused a social media backlash against the celebrity.

Results

The results of the case study analysis (Table 2) uncovered several trends that could be used as hypotheses for future research, because a sample of eight case studies is too limited to draw conclusive results. The research was further limited by exclusively looking at one type of media coverage—digital media—and excluded traditional media (print, TV, radio), as well as social media.

85 Kirstie Alley (@kirstiealley), 'I'm voting for @realDonaldTrump because he's NOT a politician', *Twitter*, 17 October 2020.

Celebrity	Endorser/ advocate	Advocate/ endorser race, the political leaning of the cause	Total reach	Focus of the coverage
Kim Kardashian West	Advocate	White, left-leaning cause	1.1 billion	84% focused
Olivia Rodrigo	Endorser	Non-white, left-leaning cause	1.6 billion	56% focused
Colin Kaepernick	Advocate	Non-white, left-leaning cause	1 billion	48.5% focused
Jeff Goldblum	Endorser	White, left-leaning cause	131 million	94% focused
Diamond and Silk	Advocate	Non-white, right-leaning cause	929 million	22% focused
Kelsey Grammer	Advocate	White, right-leaning cause	189 million	94% focused
Lil Wayne	Endorser	Non-white, right-leaning cause	511 million	38.5% focused
Kirstie Alley	Endorser	White, right-leaning cause	808 million	7.5% focused

Table 2. A summary of the results by case study, total reach, and the focus of the coverage

When race, gender, and the political leanings of the cause are accounted for (Table 3), there appears to be no significant difference between celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers when it comes to their reach, but celebrity advocates do appear to generate more focused coverage than celebrity endorsers (62 per cent of advocates’ coverage focused on the issue, compared with 49 per cent of celebrity endorsers). This confirms one part of the initial hypothesis that the type of celebrity engagement—advocacy or endorsement—does affect the focus of the media coverage.

	Reach	Focus of the coverage
Advocates v endorsers	3.18 billion – 3.05 billion	62% – 49%
White v non-white	2.2 billion – 4.04 billion	69% – 41%
Female v male	4.43 billion – 1.83 billion	42% – 69%
Left-leaning v right-leaning	3.83 billion – 2.43 billion	71% – 41%

Table 3. A summary of results by identity features, total reach, and the focus of the coverage

Surprisingly, the most important factor that affects the reach of celebrity endorsement or advocacy is not the type of engagement, but the celebrities' gender. Female celebrity endorsers and advocates can achieve more than twice the amount of reach of their male counterparts (4.43 billion compared with 1.83 billion), but the focus of that coverage is likely to be less on the cause than on themselves (42 per cent of coverage focused on issues advocated for or endorsed by female celebrities, compared with 69 per cent of their male counterparts).

Race and the political leaning of the cause undertaken also affect the media coverage. Non-white celebrities generate broader media coverage (4 billion compared with 2.2 billion), but the coverage focuses less on the cause, and instead on the celebrity (41 per cent of coverage focused on issues advocated for or endorsed by non-white celebrities, compared with 69 per cent of their white counterparts).

The political leaning of the cause also affected both the reach and the focus of the coverage. Left-leaning causes had a greater reach (3.8 billion compared with 2.4 billion) and more of the coverage was focused on the cause (71 per cent of coverage focused on left-leaning issues, compared with 41 per cent of right-leaning issues).

	Race		Gender		Cause	
	White	Non-white	Female	Male	Left-leaning	Right-leaning
Celebrity advocate						
Reach	1.28 billion	1.92 billion	2 billion	1.1 billion	2.1 billion	1.12 billion
Coverage	89%	35%	53%	71%	66%	58%
Celebrity endorser						
Reach	0.93 billion	2.11 billion	2.4 billion	0.64 billion	1.73 billion	1.31 billion
Coverage	51%	47%	32%	66%	75%	23%

Table 4. A table summarising the results by the type of celebrity activism, race, gender, and political leaning of the chosen cause. Greater values under each variable—race, gender, and cause—are highlighted in green.

When analysing aggregates by race, gender, and the political leaning of the cause, a clear pattern emerges (Table 4). Across both celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers:

- white celebrities generate more focused coverage, but non-white celebrities reach greater audiences
- female celebrities reach greater audiences, but male celebrities generate more focused coverage
- celebrities associating themselves with left-leaning causes receive both broader and more focused coverage
- white celebrity advocates attracted the most focused media coverage (89 per cent of the coverage was focused on their cause).

The narratives of the media coverage favoured white male celebrities—they were less likely to be attacked by the media on the opposite side of the political aisle, i.e., if they were advocating/endorsing a left-leaning issue the opposite side of the political aisle would be conservative media and vice versa. White female celebrities and non-white male and female

celebrities were more likely to generate negative coverage and have their credibility questioned. That was especially the case if they were engaging with a right-leaning cause. Lil Wayne, Diamond and Silk, and Kirstie Alley were all subject to ad hominem attacks—Lil Wayne for serving time in prison, Diamond and Silk for their behaviour during the press conference, and Kirstie Alley for being a part of the Church of Scientology. These narratives blurred the focus of the coverage. As a result, only 23 per cent of the coverage on right-leaning causes endorsed by the selected celebrities was focused on the cause.

Discussion

The results of the case study analysis align with some of the results of the existing empirical research and raise the need for additional research exploring the relationships between the effectiveness of celebrity activism and celebrities' identity.

The findings of the research partially confirm the original hypothesis. While the type of celebrity activism does not affect its visibility, it does affect the focus of its coverage. Celebrity advocates are more likely to get coverage that is more focused on the cause than on themselves, while celebrity endorsers are more likely to get coverage that is less focused on the cause and more focused on the celebrity. One explanation could be that celebrity advocates are more likely to engage in long-term activism of a single cause, and are, therefore, better able to communicate their message. Celebrity endorsers, on the other hand, are more opportunistic; their engagement is more limited and as a result produces less focused media coverage. This discovery contributes to the existing research on celebrity politics which did not previously consider the distinction between celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers to be a significant factor affecting the effectiveness of celebrity activism.

The case study analysis findings related to gender and the effectiveness of celebrity activism contribute to the meagre scholarship on the subject.

The findings show that female celebrity activists generate broader media coverage than do male celebrity activists, but that coverage is less focused on the cause and more focused on the celebrity. This aligns with the existing scholarship that considers ‘celebrity’ to be a gendered term because, as argued by van Zoonen, ‘public visibility is not evenly distributed among women and men’.⁸⁶ Although the findings of this research would appear to contradict that, it is more likely that both are true—women celebrities are less visible overall, but when they venture into politics, they attract more visibility because this falls outside what is perceived as ‘feminine’ and is, therefore, more newsworthy. This finding warrants a more thorough investigation to establish a causal relationship.

The findings from the content research on the impact of race also contribute to the existing literature on the subject. By observing that non-white celebrities generate broader media coverage, but that coverage is less focused on their cause compared with white celebrities, the results align with Sarah J. Jackson’s findings that mainstream media sensationalises Black celebrity activism, hence the broader coverage, but at the same time, frames it in a way that pulls the attention away from the issue. Hence, the limited focus on the cause.⁸⁷

The research also aligns with Steven J. Ross’s findings that the left-leaning celebrities are more vocal and more visible.⁸⁸ The analysis adds to Ross’s findings by quantifying the ‘visible’ part through reach and adding a new dimension of the focus of the coverage which Ross did not originally consider.

This article’s findings have some impact on individual politicians, political parties, and NGOs considering celebrity partnerships—either as endorsers or advocates. It demonstrates that partnerships with celebrity advocates can be more effective in generating focused media coverage than partnerships with celebrity endorsers. It also indicates that left-leaning causes can benefit more from celebrity activism.

86 Van Zoonen, ‘The Personal, the Political and the Popular’.

87 Jackson, *Black Celebrity*, pp. 28–29.

88 Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*, pp. 3–4.

Due to the limited number of case studies considered, the results can only be used to identify trends that should then be confirmed with additional empirical research. Additional empirical research is also needed to explore the intersectionality between race, gender, and celebrities' political leanings. Qualitative research is also needed to establish more nuanced answers to why the type of celebrities' activism and celebrities' identities affect the perception and success of their activism. Future research could consider factors related to the issues—the relevance of the issue; how polarising the issue is; how authentic the celebrity association is; how creative the application of the endorsement is; the length of time they continue to be connected with the issue; what the ask is; specifically, how tangible the action is; how the public perceive the celebrity.

Conclusion

This article identified a research gap in the field of celebrity politics—namely the lack of a framework for measuring the effectiveness of celebrity activism, and the lack of comparison of the effectiveness of different types of celebrity activism. To address this gap, this article put together its own framework for measuring the effectiveness of celebrity activism based on the existing scholarship of what *ineffective* activism looks like. The framework centred on the visibility and the focus of the media coverage that the celebrity activism—celebrity advocacy and celebrity endorsements—generated. To account for any gender, racial, or political disparities in the coverage, it controlled for gender, race, and the political leaning of the cause in the selection of the case studies. The initial hypothesis was that the type of celebrity activism affects the visibility and the focus of the media coverage.

Through the analysis of eight case studies, it was found that the type of celebrity activism affects the focus of the media coverage, but not its breadth. Although celebrity advocates and celebrity endorsers generate similarly broad media campaigns, the coverage of celebrity advocates was more focused on their cause than that of celebrity endorsers. This

partially proves the initial hypothesis that the type of celebrity activism affects the focus of the media coverage dedicated to celebrities' activism.

This article also confirmed that other factors affect the breadth and focus of the media coverage, namely gender, race, and the political affiliation of the celebrity's chosen cause. It was discovered that while women generated broader media coverage than men, men's media coverage was more focused on the cause. The same trend was observed with race—non- white celebrities generated broader coverage, but that coverage was less focused on their cause. Celebrities who took up a left-leaning cause were more likely to receive broader and more focused media coverage than the celebrities that took up right-leaning causes.

The research was limited by a small sample of case studies; therefore, to confirm the patterns identified in this research, more case studies should be reviewed. The research findings point to other areas of research that should be explored in more detail, first establishing causal relationships between the variables of celebrity activism and celebrity identity considered here. Additional research is also needed to investigate why aspects of celebrity identity—their gender and race—affect the media coverage generated by their activism. Future research should consider adding social media metrics to investigations as it is the primary medium for celebrity activism.

The results of the quantitative content analysis have important implications for politicians, political parties, NGOs, and other organisations considering celebrity partnerships, as well as the celebrities themselves. The trends identified in the research would suggest that Democrat politicians and left-leaning causes would benefit more from celebrity endorsements than their Republican counterparts or right-leaning causes. They would also suggest that celebrities should consider advocacy over endorsements to generate better quality coverage for their cause. The correlation between celebrities' gender and race should encourage more critical production and consumption of the mainstream media.

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