

CELEBRITY CAPITAL: ROLE OF CELEBRITY POLITICAL ENDORSEMENT IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS IN GHANA

Introduction

This paper is based on a research aimed at investigating celebrity politics using the emerging theories on celebrity capital in the context of an emerging democracy or third wave democracy, Ghana. The research focuses on the role of celebrity endorsement in the 2008 and 2012 election campaigns in Ghana to explore the mechanism of celebrity politics and capital in Ghana. The main aim of this paper is explain the theoretical underpinning of the research. While the research is located firmly in celebrity politics literature, it takes inspiration from political communication and political marketing literature.

This is because though celebrity political endorsements has been treated as part of political communication and marketing mix especially during election campaigns, celebrity politics including celebrity political endorsement has gradually gained recognition as a sub-discipline of celebrity studies. In addition, most of the literature in this sub-discipline has focused on established and western democracies with very little investigation on new and emerging democracies especially in Africa. This thesis will therefore enhance the argument on how celebrity politics and celebrity capital shapes political communication and political marketing in an emerging democracy with peculiar political, party and media systems from that of established western democracies.

Why Celebrities are used as endorsers

There is a believe that when celebrities support a cause or a political candidate/party, the media, the general public and even policy makers take notice (Duncombe, 2007). It is the perceived influence and visibility that celebrities can bring to their causes that has led to them serving as endorsers of political campaigns and political candidates. Thus while a number of celebrities are eager to pledge support for a political candidate/party, political parties/candidates actively seek such celebrity endorsement. According to Smillie (2004), celebrities and politicians offer one another something that they individually lack; while elected officials have credibility, they are often not liked; and while celebrities are often well-liked and admired, they don't often have credibility or respectability to their names. Thus supporting a political party/candidate brings personal satisfaction and respectability to a celebrity while the political candidate/party gets money and media attention from the celebrity support.

Theoretical Concept

This research is moving away from previous research where the focus of celebrity political endorsement was to measure the effect and impact of the endorsement. Thus the early research by Jackson and Darrow (2005), Jackson's (2007), and Inthorn and Street (2011) used the Source Credibility Model to explain the effect of celebrity political endorsement while Morin, Ivory, and Tubbs's (2012) Zwarun and Torrey's (2011), Pease and Brewer (2008) used the Meaning Transfer Model. Kuehl (2010) and Garthwaite and Moore (2008) explained effect of celebrity political endorsement using Social Comparison Theory, Identification and Parasocial Interaction theories. These previous research exposed the

difficulty in empirically estimating the effect and influence of such endorsements. This is because effects are measured after the political outcome thus making it difficult to credit political outcomes solely to celebrity political endorsement when there could be other complex reason at play which can also affect voting decisions.

Thus this research moves away from the effect theories, and concentrate on understanding the role of celebrity endorsements in election campaigns by asking the following questions:

1. What qualities and resources do celebrities possess which makes them attractive as political endorsers?
2. What role does celebrity political endorsement play in political marketing and communications in an emerging democracy like Ghana especially during election campaigns?

The overarching theoretical concept adopted for this research is therefore taken from Pierre Bourdieu's Theoretical Construct of Capital and Fields because it provides a valuable framework for understanding the qualities imbedded in celebrity status and how these qualities can be utilized by the celebrity themselves and the people associated with them. According to Bourdieu, capital refers to a resource that the gives the holder, power and advantage within a particular social space. However one important point about capital according to Bourdieu "a capital does not exist and function except *in relation to a field*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101). Capital cannot be discussed without relating it to a field because from Bourdieu's perspective, social spaces are divided into various fields. Within these various fields, a constant struggle for positioning ensues between the various actors in the field (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu makes three distinct observations about capital and how it operates within a field. Firstly, the level of capital possessed by actors relative to one another within the field determines the amount of power and position wielded by the actors within the field (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). Secondly, capital can be accumulated by actors within a field through various means resulting in uneven possession of capital. In other words, through accumulation of capital, some actors will have more capital than others and this will result in actors with more capital having power and dominance over those with less capital within the field. Finally, each capital from Bourdieu's perspective can be converted into another form of capital to the benefit of actors within a field or across fields.

Celebrity Capital

From this theoretical concept, it can be concluded that what makes celebrities attractive as endorsers is founded on the capital imbedded in the celebrity. The concept of celebrity as a form of capital is however not new. Krieken (2012) sees celebrity as the "embodiment of a more abstract kind of capital—attention" (2012: 54) concluding that celebrity therefore is "primarily a matter of the accumulation and distribution of attention" (van Krieken 2012: 55). Hunter et al. (2009:140) also defines celebrity capital as a celebrity's' "public awareness, their favorability, their personality, reputation, and the public's knowledge of past behaviors." Celebrity capital works out as a kind of reputational capital that can be used as a strategic asset which can increase the perceived trustworthiness, credibility, reliability, responsibility, and accountability of a celebrity and those associated with that celebrity.

Collins (2007) research introduces the concept of celebrity capital as “a particular configuration of symbolic capital that is required (among the other forms of capital) to inhabit and operate successfully as a cultural commodity within the field of entertainment” (Collins 2007: 191).

Cronin and Shaw (2002) define celebrity capital as an accumulation of media visibility which can result in symbolic capital. Referring to celebrity capital as an accumulation of media visibility has been expanded further by Davis (2010) in his research looking at celebrity politics. He concludes media visibility can lead to the accumulation of the symbolic and political capital necessary for advancement in the political field. Heinich (2012) also supports the notion of celebrity capital as an accumulation of visibility generated through media representation. Her work proposes that celebrity capital has its material basis in recurrent media representations or accumulated media visibility and so must be viewed as having a specific kind of attention-generating capacity. Driessens (2013) supports the definition of celebrity capital as recognisability, or an accumulation of media visibility as a result of recurrent media representations.

What is instructive about these definitions of celebrity capital is that it is tied to visibility associated with media representation. This means that the media is very important when talking about celebrity capital. It also means that not all celebrities will have the same level of capital. Finally, celebrity capital can be converted into other forms of capital which can be useful within the different fields that the celebrity operates. The strength in using Bourdieu's theory to explain celebrity lies in the recognition of the differences in rules governing various fields and the power struggles that exists in different fields. Each field recognizes different forms of capital as a source of symbolic power within that field. Thus celebrity capital behaves differently in the different fields that it is introduced into.

Celebrity Capital in the political field

When it comes to celebrity capital in the political field there are two forms. Politicians that have gained celebrity status due to the high visibility accorded them by the media. Such high visibility can lead to the accumulation of celebrity capital that can be used to change power dynamic within the political field (Tony Blair, Barack Obama). This is especially true within a highly mediated political field. The second type is celebrities from other fields such as the entertainment field who due to their high visibility accumulate celebrity capital which they seek to migrate to the political field in the form of endorsement, advocacy or seeking elected political appointment (for example, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Ronald Reagan, Bono, George Clooney). For the purpose of this research the concentration is on celebrities from the entertainment world who seek migrate their celebrity capital from the entertainment field to the political field by endorsing political parties/candidates during election campaigns. In order to do that there is a need to first understand the media field of Ghana which provides the visibility to celebrities that is instrumental in their accumulation of celebrity capital. Second the political field is important in this research because it gives an indication of the field dynamism and the actors at play within the field and how the introduction of celebrities as endorsers affects the power struggles within the field.

Political System of Ghana

Ghana, like a majority of other African countries, has experienced various political transitions in the form of slavery, colonial rule, multi-party democracy after gaining independence, military dictatorship and a return to multi-party democracy in 1992 (Austin, 1961; Monfils, 1977; Anebo, 1997; Handly and Mills, 2001). The post independent constitutions of 1958, was overthrown by a military coup in 1966 and attempts in 1969 and 1979 to reinstate multi-party democracy also suffered military coups in 1972 and 1981 respectively.

However 1992 saw a change in the socio-political landscape of Ghana when Ghanaians overwhelmingly voted for a constitutional mandate in a referendum ushering in the fourth republic and making a transition to democracy by introducing multiparty elections. The new constitution require the organization of presidential and parliamentary elections by a permanent independent Electoral Commission (EC) on the 7th day of December every four years across the 10 regions in the country (EC, as at 25 August 2011, <http://www.ec.gov.gh/node/8>) by secret ballot under universal suffrage for all citizens over the age of 18. The constitution ushering in the Fourth Republic came into force on January 7, 1993, when Ft. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, a military dictator from 1981 to 1992, was inaugurated as President of the Republic and members of Parliament were sworn into office. This ushered in a political system that is a hybrid of the Executive Presidency of the American political system and the British Parliamentary system.

Competition in Ghana politics is high especially given the perceived willingness of voters to shift support between the various political parties from one election to the next. This is evident in the change of political power from the NDC party to the NPP party in 2000 elections and again from the NPP party to the NDC party in 2008 elections. Literature show that Ghanaians are experienced at multiparty elections which is evident in the fact that the two main parties (the NDC and the NPP) have alternated in governing during the current republic. The parties share support from a margin of flexible voters who shift allegiance based on political, moral, personal, policy issues and environmental factors (Ephson, 2003; Lindberg and Morrison, 2005; Alabi, 2007). Ghanaian voters tend to have strong ties to political parties based on historical, ethnic, family, religious and socio-economic sentiments. And this is reflected in the voting patterns across the elections. However since the margin between the winner and loser of an election can be less than 2%, (the constitution says that in a presidential elections, a winner is declared if that person gains 50% plus one vote in the valid votes cast) appealing to that small of swing voters can result in a political party/candidate winning or losing the elections.

Throughout the four republics that Ghana political systems have witnessed, political parties have remain relevant to Ghana's democratic process and the conduit for political participation in the area of elected office. All political candidates elected as President and majority of those elected as Members of Parliament (MP) get elected based on a political party tickets. There have been a number of attempts by candidates not affiliated with any political party to contest both presidential and parliamentary offices. This has met with very little success since no independent candidate has ever won the presidency and with the

parliamentary; only four and one independent candidates have succeeded in the 2000 and 2004 elections respectively. This is mainly due to the fact that the country's constitution is a hybrid of both the American presidential system of government with some elements of the British parliamentary system. Thus a presidential candidate selected through party primaries is elected directly by popular vote in the same way that a Member of Parliament is. This makes political parties very powerful agents in Ghana's democratic dispensation.

The current party scene of the fourth republic largely reflects two traditional political ideologies – social democracy made up of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and capitalist ideology supported by New Patriotic Party (NPP). There are other smaller parties of very insignificant membership. The NDC rose on the populist remnants of Rawlings's military regime (1981-92). It is ideologically akin to the Nkrumahists, as the hypothetical party of the commoners, and adopts similar electoral strategies. The NPP on the other hand is dominated by an intellectual, business, and professional elite, dedicated to liberal governance and a free market economy. The NPP is believed to cater to many urban adherents.

The two dominant parties, the NPP and the NDC maintain a relationship with their ideological partners in both the UK and the USA and send high-level party delegates to attend these ideological partners' party political conferences. Such trips are seen as an opportunity to learn more on political organization, fund-raising and voter mobilization (Mensah, 2011). Thus it can be argued that campaign practices in Ghana will be influenced by both the candidate-centred campaigning of the US and the British party-centred system. However this influence is hindered by Ghanaian indigenous factors like electoral system, media system, and especially the patterns of partisan identification. Patterns of partisan identification are influenced by other subconscious identifications like ethnicity, family, religion, and other sectional divisions over the years. Although the 1992 constitution especially forbids political parties to be formed especially along ethnic and religious lines, research shows that political parties continue to mobilize voters according to these subconscious identifications than ideological cleavages (Nugent, 2001; Ninsin, 2006). This means that predicting voting patterns in Ghana has proved very difficult. Research has so far not been able to explain the reasoning behind the voting choices of Ghanaians. What is evident is that very few voters identify with party ideology, with many voting according to family, religious or ethnic attachment to a particular political party. Other voters are believed to go with the electoral hype or political parties that seem the most appealing during electioneering campaigns (Mensah, 2011).

Ghana's political landscape continues to be dominated by two parties. The NDC and NPP have dominated in all six elections held under the fourth republic elections, alternating in office with the NDC winning the general election and being in charge of the country from 1993 to 2000. They were then followed by the NPP from 2001 to 2008. The NPP then handed over again to the NDC again in 2009. The two parties' together account for more than 91 per cent of the total votes cast in all the elections and have dominated the socio-political discourse of Ghana (Morrison, 2004, p. 429). The results from the six held elections

show that individual party dominance is fragile and vulnerable to competition and both parties are constantly jostling for core party membership and support stakes (Ninsin, 2006, p. 18) in order to look electorally good well before every election campaigns starts. The 2012 elections saw the two parties extending their monopoly on the Ghanaian political scene since together they polled over ninety-eight percent (98%) laying claim to almost all the constituents.

Media System

In Ghana all communication between social actors and political matters are through interpersonal means or mediated (Negrine and Stanyer, 2007, p. 1), and this fact is comparable with America and other European democracies in terms of political campaigning and political marketing. The media creates a narrative of political process in a country and the Ghana media landscape operates in the same manner. What differs is the objectivity of the narrative which is to a large extent shaped by the political system and the media processes like political ideological alignment, commercial outlook and professionalism of media personal.

Ghana's media system has seen the most transformation in the country since its liberalization enshrined in the 1992 constitution. With the liberalization and deregulation of the media and communication industry in 1996, the industry has become very competitive. The state is no longer the only important actor in establishing the mass media infrastructure since majority of media organisations are under private ownership. Ghana can now boast of more than hundred FM stations scattered in all the regions, about forty newspapers, eight television broadcasting houses (Ghana Media Commission), and cable networks such as CNN, Al Jazeera, and the BBC, to mention a few. Privately owned media conglomerates like Multimedia Group, Despite Group are springing up in the country. Such conglomerates boost of ownership from print, radio, television and online media setups.

This liberalisation has impacted on the relationship between political institutions and the citizen which is believed to be similar in most liberalized democracies with radio, television, and print making an impact on the political system in the country (Mensah, 2011). Access in terms of variety and regional spread of these media organisations has provided an avenue for citizens from all walks of life to contribute, get informed, and make decisions within the media forum provided. Although this is the trend observed among all media formats, the radio is believed to have experienced the most growth and popularity among citizens (Gadzekpo, 2005; Mensah, 2011).

The Ghana Media has a peculiar discourse with political actors which are founded around the political outlook of the ownership of the media organisation. The state owned media organisation in outlook promotes the agenda and programs of the government in power. However in order to be viable as a business, they have to present some of the views and ideology of opposing political parties. The private media owners on the other hand are usually aligned along party lines. In fact, some of these media organisations are owned by political parties or ranking members of political parties (Mensah, 2011). Thus majority of these media organisations promotes an agenda that will be beneficial to the political aspirations of the ownership. This agenda becomes more glaring during political campaign

season where these media organisations try to balance the political interest of the owners while at the same time ensuring economic viability of the organisation. The Ghana media system is therefore seen as vital to the political discourses in the country.

Methodology

In selecting a methodology for this research, methods used in political marketing research in general and celebrity politics with emphasis on celebrity political endorsement specifically served as an indicator on which method will best complement this research. Thus methodological and analytical insights from Trevor Thrall *et al.* (2008), Mensah (2011) and Driessens (2013a, 2013b, 2013c) informed this research. This research uses a mixed methods approach which involves using two or more methods that draw on different meta-theoretical assumptions (Moran-Ellis et al, 2006:3). The rationale for selecting this approach is based on Bowker, 2001 who advocates for the use of multiple methods to capture complexity and multiple contexts of a phenomenon. Researching the role of Celebrity political endorsements in election campaigns within a new and evolving democracy like Ghana is a complex phenomenon. This is because while there have been research on this phenomenon in developed democracies like USA, Europe and in other evolving democracies in South America and Asia, the phenomenon has not been explored in the African context. Thus it provides a challenge of looking at celebrities within a media, social, cultural and political complexity of an African country whose democracy is still relatively young and evolving. The research employs a mixed methods approach by drawing on data from three main sources comprising media items (in the form of news stories from an online news sites); and focus group discussions with citizen of Ghana within the voting age of eighteen (18) and above; and in-depth interviews with selected celebrities and party campaign managers for 2008 and 2012 elections.

For the media content analysis, the period under study covers the last four (4) months of the electoral year, i.e., September to December 2008 and 2012. These two periods have been chosen due to the perceived competitiveness and use of active political marketing tools, including the use of celebrity political endorsements, during these times. It must be mentioned that data for this research was collected approximately six and two years after the elections in 2008 and 2012. Due this fact, there were challenges in the collection of data due to limited access to archival materials for the media analysis.

For the focus group, thirty six (36) eligible voters who cast ballots in the 2008 and 2012, were purposefully selected from four (4) randomly selected constituencies from the swing region (Ephson, 2003) of Greater Accra. In addition to being a swing region, Greater Accra, has the second highest voter population in Ghana and is second on the number of representation/constituency seats in parliament (Ghana Electoral Commission, 2012). As the capital city of the Republic of Ghana, it has a representation of all the ethnic, religious and social grouping in the country (Ghana Statistical Service census results, 2010). Sampling from this region is therefore deemed to be a fair representation of views from all the different social, cultural and religious grouping within the country. The participants were

divided into groups in each selected constituency with each group made up of six (6) individuals.

For the semi structured interviews, a total of nine (9) people were to be administered semi structured interviews. Sampling included five (5) celebrities from the entertainment and media fields, who endorsed the NDC and NPP in the 2008 and/or 2012 election campaigns and four (4) political party and candidates' campaign strategists, made up of two (2) each for the NPP and NDC. The focus on the two political parties stem from the fact that the two parties together consistently poll about ninety eight percent (98%) of the total votes cast (Ghana Electoral Commission published election results, 2008 & 2012).

Findings

The above brief on the political and media field of Ghana are the two things which are important in conducting the empirical research using Bourdieu's theoretical concept about fields and capital. And as mentioned previously, the purpose of this research was to answer two research questions.

1. What qualities and resources do celebrities possess which makes them attractive as political endorsers?
2. What role does celebrity political endorsement play in political marketing and communications in an emerging democracy like Ghana especially during election campaigns?

From previous literature, the Media gives celebrity the visibility capital that is used to generate celebrity capital. The empirically research unearth some interesting results which is unique and quite dissimilar from established western democracies.

Due to the structure of the media ownership in Ghana, politicians get higher visibility and rank high on the celebrity spectrum than entertainment and media celebrities. This means that political celebrities have more celebrity capital than other celebrities from other fields. This is supported by the FGDs held with a selection of Ghanaian voters in the capital city Accra. When asked who their favourite celebrity was, 85% mentioned the name of a politician as their favourite celebrity with former presidents getting the highest mention. This is also reflected in media coverage of celebrity endorsement. Celebrity political endorsement from entertainment and media celebrities generated very few media coverage with less than 2% of total coverage on political campaign coverage. In fact a rumoured endorsement by the wife of a former president received a lot more coverage in comparison with celebrity endorsements from entertainment and media celebrities.

Endorsement coverage also reflected media polarization along political lines. Same coverage of an endorsement receives different coverage depending on the political affiliation of the media house covering the story. An example is a story from the General News section of ghanaweb.com dated Sunday, 7 September 2008 with the headline "**Rawlings Roars Like a Lion -Maame Dokono**" This story was in reference to ace actress and TV Hostess, Grace

Omaboe, popularly call Maame Dokono. In this story the celebrity in endorsing the NPP party and presidential candidate on the candidate's campaign tour of Brong-Ahafo, one of the ten regions in Ghana, cautioned Ghanaians to be weary of former president Jerry Rawlings because he is a roaring lion seeking to devour innocent people.

'You must be watchful and prayerful because Rawlings is roaring like a lion seeking whom to devour', she said and led the people to bind the devil in Rawlings. She said Mr. Rawlings and his NDC are hungry for power and have resorted to spreading lies about the economy and the ruling NPP just to win the sympathy of unsuspecting Ghanaians'.

The story is credited to a reporter from Space FM, Sunyani , a radio station with perceived political affiliation to the NPP party. The same story was reported as a Feature Article of Monday, 15 September 2008 on ghanaweb.com with the headline "**The Ugly Noises Of An Actress Turn Politician**". The story started by questioning the use of celebrities on campaign platforms advocating for a discouragement of such actions by celebrities. The story then went on to attack Grace Omaboe generally and sought to respond to the utterances of the celebrity on the campaign platform.

'One person who is spewing falsehood and spreading hate campaigns is Maame Dorkono. The actor turn politician. She was reported in media as urging Ghanaians not to vote for the NDC because former President Rawlings is roaring like a lion seeking to devour them. I found this statement unacceptable and unbecoming of a talk show host and an artiste'.

The writer of the article identifies himself as a member of the NDC party. There were several stories that followed this trend.

Perception about endorsement from sampled voting public show that celebrities that migrate from the entertainment and media field into the political field do not bring the capital accrued from their field of origin into the political field. Visibility capital, social capital does not transfer and in fact they end up losing capital which affects them in their original fields. This is because in the political field as mentioned earlier, politicians have more visibility capital and what is transferred by celebrities from entertainment and media field is negligible. Out of **665** news items for 2008 and **1,248** for 2012 with headlines focusing on campaigns of the two major political parties, only six (**6**) stories for 2008 and eighteen (**18**) stories for 2012 focused on endorsement by celebrities from the entertainment or media fields. The other stories focused on the main political actors. From the FGDs it was clear that social capital in terms of fans of these celebrities do not necessarily support their political utterances. About **90%** of the FGD members say they are happy when a celebrity they adore endorses their preferred candidate but will ignore their statements if they do not support their preferred candidate. Some will actually stop patronizing anything associated with the celebrity if they endorse a candidate or political party they members of the FGDs did not support. During the interview with the celebrities all of them mentioned economic loses and lose of core fans due to their political endorsement.

Another key finding of this research is that because of how the political field is structured, celebrities from other fields entering the political field face resistance. This is based on comments from campaign managers and celebrities in the in-depth interviews. Almost all celebrities and campaign managers interviewed mentioned internal conflict between celebrity endorsers and party officials or members of the campaigns. This is because these celebrities are seen as outsiders who hold no real party loyalties. With the exception of one celebrity who confessed to being a card bearing member of the party he endorsed, the rest of the endorsers were part of the campaign because of the candidate or a policy of the party which they believe in. Interestingly all except one of the celebrity endorsers, have political ambitions including wanting to seek political office. However knowing the resistance they will face from the parties they expressed the aim of standing as independent candidates and using their popularity and fandom to propel them into political office. However this is likely to fail since our political system is unfriendly to independent candidates.

Usefulness of celebrities to election campaign lies in their ability to bring excitement and energising the campaign. In addition, by political candidates associating themselves with celebrities from the entertainment and media field, they gain personal appeal. This is because political campaigning in Ghana is becoming very similar to presidential style campaigns in the US election campaigns where the contest is between personalities and a test of personal appeal instead of issues. The role of the celebrity therefore is to showcase the political contenders as 'although extraordinary and deserve high office they are like ordinary Ghanaians who listen to our kind of music or our type of movies so they are people that the electorate can also hang out with' (except from interview with one campaign manager).

Celebrity political endorsement in Ghana because of the unique media and political system is very different from western democracies especially when it involves celebrities migrating from other fields into the political field. Their celebrity capital does not transfer necessarily migrate with the celebrity to the political field. They bring very little of their visibility capital in terms of generating coverage for the campaign; their social capital in terms of their fan base are hardly influenced by their political stance; and they have no economic capital since they do not attract campaign funding or do not command large funding by themselves to contribute to political campaigns. In fact most electorate see them as not credible since there's a belief that the celebrities get paid for the endorsement and this perception was held by all the participants of the FGDs. However interviews with the celebrities show a claim of non-payment for the endorsement though almost all of them claim to know some celebrities that were paid for their endorsement.

Despite the virtual ineffectiveness of celebrity endorsers, the conclusion from the research is that there is a belief that celebrities generate excitement about the candidate and party and will thus continue to feature in Ghana politics especially since voting margins between the winner and loser of the elections is less than 2%. Anything to give candidates and parties an

edge is still seen as worthy. This means that celebrity political endorsement will continue to be a part of the campaign marketing strategy of political candidates and parties. What is also obvious is that, celebrities from other fields wishing to use their celebrity to gain political influence within the party or pursue political office is aggressively resisted by both party members and electorate. In fact to date only one celebrity has achieved elected office in Ghana. Maybe as the media and political system continue to evolve the story might be different after a few elections.

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