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Celebrity Politics and Cultural Studies Within the United States and United Kingdom 🔓

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Summary and Keywords

Celebrity politicians are having a profound impact on the practice of politics within the United States and United Kingdom in the 21st century. With the adoption of social media platforms, celebrity and image candidates have deployed new strategies for attracting constituents. Taken together, the proliferation of celebrity politics and the ubiquity of digital platforms have fostered a unique atmosphere in the contemporary political moment, wherein "outsider" candidates may leverage their fame to launch themselves into the public spotlight. In turn, through their celebrity brands and digital presence both populists such as the U.S. President Donald Trump and left-wing leaders including U.K. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn have established an "authenticity" in which they "occupy" a public space to define their candidacies. Consequently, as celebrities and image candidates promote political agendas among target audiences/citizens, it is necessary to reflect upon their significance in election campaigns, policy agendas, and activism.

Keywords: celebrity, politicians, elections, campaigns, activism, media, social media, para-social, affective capacity, authenticity, communication and critical studies

Introduction

Celebrity politicians are having a profound impact upon the practice of politics in the 21st century. Yet, many academic criticisms of celebrity politics have continued to view the production of celebrity as the product of a "manufactured process" fabricated by media exposure (Louw, 2005; Turner, 2004). Public interest in celebrity has been manipulated through contrived, pseudo-events staged by a cynical media (Boorstin, 1971, p. 65). However, with the continuing rise of the political engagement of celebrities and politicians as celebrities across the public sphere, this literature requires a critical re-evaluation. In particular, with the phenomenon of film, sports, and business celebrities

becoming elected politicians (Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Clint Eastwood, Jesse Ventura, and Donald Trump) it may be argued that it does not comprehend the influence of celebrity on political decision-making processes.

An alternative literature has identified the trends toward the celebritization of politics both theoretically (Street, 2004, 2012, 2017) and empirically (Holmes & Redmond, 2006) through an exploration of how and why politicians have behaved as though they are celebrities and by ascertaining the ways in which celebrities seek to influence politics. Consequently, as celebrities and image candidates assume a moral authority for political agendas among target audiences and citizens, it becomes necessary to reflect upon the significance in political campaigns.

This article tracks the development of an important subsector of political communications and celebrity studies—celebrity politics and its worth in defining modern democratic practices within the United States and the United Kingdom.[1] It will consider how politicians are behaving like celebrities and celebrities have become activists and discusses the rise of celebrities as elected politicians. Critical theorists such as Douglas Kellner (2010, 2016) have provided an analysis of celebrity engagement by citing it within the media "spectacle" of public relations and marketing. Alternatively, John Street has considered how the popular aesthetics employed by celebrity politicians may be linked with reconfigured practices of political engagement.

Secondly, the article will consider how celebrity can be conceived to function within the political realm. Street (2004) has developed an analytical distinction between celebrity politicians (CPs) who have used populist techniques when seeking elected office (CP1s) and celebrities who have employed their fame to promote political issues (CP2s). In turn, this analysis considers some key examples of CP1 and CP2 engagement in terms of political performance, endorsement, activism, and humanitarianism.

Finally, I will consider the related dynamic in which celebrities have become politicians. With the adoption of social media platforms, celebrity and image candidates have deployed new strategies for attracting constituents. "Outsider" candidates have leveraged their fame to launch themselves into the public spotlight. Thus, the article considers the media and digital presence of the populist US President Donald Trump during his 2016 campaign to understand how such celebrities-turned-politicians have constructed their presence as political outsiders.

Style Over Substance: The Traditional Paradigm

Critics such as Neil Postman (1987) claim that the political communication process has led to a decline in rationality as televisual style dominates substantive debate. This critique suggests that there has been a negative impact on the public sphere and civic engagement). Daniel Boorstin (1971) has argued that under such conditions illusions were mistaken for reality and that fame was constructed as an industrial process. In tandem, political communications have evidenced the convergence of public relations (PR) techniques with commercial pressures drawn from the global media, which has led to a focus on style over substance. In such a commodification of politics, public interest in celebrity politicians has been manipulated through contrived pseudo-events staged managed by a cynical media to construct a myth of individual expression. Following upon this logic, Eric Louw has argued that a "pseudo-politics" has emerged wherein there has been a PR-ization of political issues "in which celebrities are now enlisted to whip up mass public opinion" (Louw, 2005, p. 191).

The most sophisticated variation of this position has been identified by Douglas Kellner, who has employed the concept of the "media spectacle" to suggest that the emphasis on celebrity replaces the complexities of policy with symbolic gestures (Kellner, 2010, p. 123). Kellner argues that the media coverage of celebrity politics draws attention to the publicizing of issues, which he believes creates a form of spectacle that "frames" politicians and celebrities as global "superstars." Kellner (2010) suggests that, in this world of manufactured media spectacle, there has been a substitution of substance with symbolic politics in which the norms of democratic engagement have been undermined (p. 123).

Underpinning the traditional paradigm is a normative position on how celebrity activists diminish the processes of representative democracy. Thus, the most common analysis of celebrity-ness has referred to the ubiquitous growth of the visual media in which fame operates as a tool through which to manipulate public opinion. It is contended that such a usage of performance is pitched on artifice and sells prescriptive ideas to a disengaged public.

Political Aesthetics, Para-Social Relations, and Affective Capacities

The traditional paradigm may be criticized as it perceives political communication as a top-down process between political elites and a passive electorate. It disregards the polysemic range of readings audiences take from political imagery. Such an approach

ignores the effects of celebritized politicians in forging new or alternative social formations for engagement and does not truly evaluate the influence of imagery on the public's political decision-making processes. Instead, it is necessary to consider the changes in political aesthetics that have facilitated the opportunities through which celebrities have influenced politics and politicians have popularized themselves. As P. David Marshall (1997) comments, "a leader must somehow embody the sentiments of the party, the people and the state . . . a celebrity must somehow embody the sentiments of the audience" (p. 203).

Moreover, there has been a major cultural shift in which celebrities have assumed a moral authority among target audiences that was previously associated with charismatic leaders. While celebrities were politically active in the past, their fans demonstrated little or no desire to see their favorite actors, musicians, and performers in a political guise. Within the contemporary entertainment-news nexus, however, as Chris Rojek (2015) has explained, audiences have now developed para-social relationships with well-known or famous figures. Therefore, people respond to celebrity figures as if they are ordinary members of the public who they actually "know" (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These relations create a virtual companionship between audiences and film, music, and sports stars. Further, they foment different modes of identification wherein we see ourselves, or ideal versions of ourselves, within the celebrity figures that have been mediatized within the popular culture (Feilitzen & Linne, 1975).

Consequently, celebrities and image candidates command credibility through a conjunction of this para-social familiarity alongside the personalization of politics to transcend other agencies of social authority. Significant changes in "affective capacities" (Marshall, 1997) have occurred across a range of political representations. They have shaped the ways in which the public thinks about, and interacts with, politicians, particularly nonpartisan or otherwise populist figures. Such forms of representation have enhanced the influence of "personal authenticity."

John Street's work provides an analysis of how the political aesthetics of celebrity politicians interlinks with their democratic worth. He not only makes the distinction between celebrity politicians (CPs) who have used their celebrity to encourage their worth, as in the case of politicians utilizing more populist techniques (CP1s) and the growing significance of celebrities lending their fame to promote causes (CP2s) (Street, 2004), but demonstrates how celebrity politics is consistent with a liberal democratic ethos. Most especially, through the typologies of CP1 and CP2, Street provides an analytical framework through which to consider how celebrity performance aids and abets political engagement.

Whereas image candidates had previously incorporated elements of celebrity into their personas, celebrity politicians (CP1s) have utilized elements of performance, branding, public relations, and spin to affect the representation of their political characters. More recently, these characteristics have segued into a range of political advertising options as elections have been fought on television and are being contested within the social media.

Thus, for John Corner and Dick Pels (2003), CP1s are required to "perform" in an "attempt to convince us that [they operate] congruently with the political demands placed upon [themselves]" (Drake & Higgins, 2006, p. 89).

Celebrity Politicians 1: The United States and Barack Obama

Within the United States, there has been a transformation from a personalization of politics into an outright celebritization of a politician's candidacy (Stanyer, 2007, p. 73). Charismatic leaders with likeable, yet unique, personas have contested modern campaigns to seek office. Therefore, CP1 attributes have emerged due to permanent campaigns, the rise of the politician as an entertainer, and success with previously untapped sections of the electorate.

Throughout the "media spectacle" (Kellner, 2010, p. 121) concerning the coverage of the US primaries and the general elections in 2008 and 2012, Barack Obama developed his image as an intellectual and articulate African American politician. He reached out to conventional voters and to a largely ignored young, black, and disaffected section of the electorate. Obama built up his position as a legitimate political leader who was defined by his cosmopolitan and international background. Throughout the campaign he fused together a popular narrative that brought together two of the aspects vital for a CP1's performance—the construction of persona defined by an effective story of hope, fortitude, and political heroism (Alexander, 2010, p. 314). Further, Obama enhanced his CP1 position through his campaign's orchestration of an army of activists for fundraising purposes and electoral support through the new information technologies (Alexander, 2010, p. 59). He engaged with the public through his own website mybarackobama.com (MyBo), and social media including YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter (Redmond, 2010).

During his administration, Obama employed CP1 attributes to enhance his popularity despite considerable domestic and foreign policy difficulties. To boost his ratings before the congressional midterm elections, he became the first sitting president to appear on Jon Stewart's satirical *Daily Show* on October 27, 2010. Within this interview, Obama hoped to appeal to the younger, liberal members of the electorate and to acknowledge that his reforms would take time to be effective. Toward the end of his second term of office, Obama was interviewed by *New York Times* fashion magazine writer Philip Galanes and *Breaking Bad* leading actor Bryan Cranston. The president reflected on the importance of the celebrity image he cultivated with the US public:

One thing you have to keep in mind is that I'm probably the most recorded, filmed and photographed person in history up to now. Because I'm the first president who came along in the digital age. Every leader is a funnel for the culture he lives in.

(Galanes, 2016)

Celebrity Politicians 1: The United Kingdom and Jeremy Corbyn

UK politicians have sought to develop CP1 techniques into British electoral practices. The former "New Labour" Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997–2007) emulated "relationship marketing" (Kuhn, 2007, p. 212) strategies that have been associated with US political leaders. He developed his "telegenic" skills by making speeches that were littered with sound bites, provided photo opportunities, and engaged in many stage-managed appearances.

Yet, until recently in Britain, a CP1's success or failure was less contingent upon the formation of a social movement. However, current Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn (2015–present) shows that an unlikely figure could galvanize his "affective capacities" into the mainstream of politics. This ascendancy to the leadership referred to his engagement with a grassroots set of activists led by the left-wing political organization Momentum. In 2015, a political "earthquake" occurred when the resolutely hard-left Socialist Corbyn became the ultimate "uncelebrity" politician as he contested the Labour Party leadership election. Despite receiving continuously bad press during the campaign, Corbyn, who had been a back-bench member of Parliament with a long history of voting against the Labour governments, won the leadership race with an unprecedented mandate of 251,000 votes.

Corbyn's unique form of political capital demonstrated how Labour Party members had responded to him due to his authenticity of his character. This was formed from a consistency within his political positions and a plain-speaking approach to the campaign. In turn, this led to his campaign speeches being rapturously received in a spirit of religious revivalism. Such was the enthusiasm that people had to be turned away and Corbyn had to speak outside the halls to the over-capacity crowds. Therefore, in a remarkably short time, Corbyn achieved a passionate fan base of which many celebrities would have been jealous:

The huge fandom that in just a few weeks has come to circulate in and through [Corbyn] is a signal of the vitality of what he's saying and provides a way of making those ideas accessible to people—especially those who may have felt themselves and their lives unrepresented by mainstream politicians.

(Mendick, 2015)

Through this groundswell of partisan opinion, Corbyn channeled his authenticity into a definable form of political capital to win the campaign. Although he decried the politics of celebrity, his blend of traditional socialist values with a sophisticated use of the social media such as Twitter (#JezWeCan) meant that he constructed a para-social relationship with audiences. In breaking the rules and utilizing social media networks, Corbyn became a beacon for returning members and a younger generation of activists to forge a social movement. For many within the party, he offered alternative socialist policies designed to offset the political norms concerning "austerity" and provided a different way to conduct political communications. In effect, Corbyn became an unlikely political superstar.

Corbyn as Labour Leader and the 2017 General Election

To the incredulity of his political opponents within the Labour Party (including Blair, Peter Mandelson, Alastair Campbell, and Gordon Brown) and the "commentariat" composed of mainstream journalists, opinion piece writers, and disaffected "Blairite" "spin doctors" (such as Lance Price and John McTernan), Corbyn pursued a resolutely socialist agenda. Moreover, he remained "unspun" and appointed the left-wing journalist Seamus Milne as his Director of Communications. Therefore, it was decided within the "echo-chambers" of the "Westminster village" and the editorial offices of the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* (who continuously smeared Corbyn) that his leadership would be a short-lived anomaly.

The resentment evidenced toward Corbyn from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) became manifest in 2016. Principally, there was a direct challenge to his leadership when a large number of shadow cabinet members resigned in the aftermath the Brexit outcome of the 2016 European Union referendum. Most especially, the dissenters claimed that Corbyn had failed to show any real commitment to the so-called Remain campaign, that he would be electorally disastrous, and that he should go for the "good of the party." As a consequence, there was a second leadership contest in the summer of 2016 that Corbyn comfortably won against his challenger Owen Smith.

However, when Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May called for a snap UK general election in 2017, the consensus was that there would be a Conservative Party landslide. Within the PLP and among political commentators it was felt that Corbyn would preside over the worst electoral defeat in the Labour Party's history. Despite such dire predictions, he utilized his CP1 form of political capital to affect an impressive electoral performance. In the event, the Labour Party gained over 40 percent of the electorates' support and registered an increase of over thirty seats. This meant that while the Conservative Party had the largest number of seats, it had failed to achieve a popular

mandate. Subsequently, May's government would have to operate within a "hung" Parliament with the equivocal support of the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party.

The Labour Party produced a manifesto that included pledges to oppose the austerity agenda. This turned the focus of the election away from Brexit and toward socialist concerns about the redistribution of wealth through taxation, public expenditure, and welfare provision. Moreover, the public perception of Corbyn as an approachable leader palpably changed during the six weeks of the campaign. This stood in contrast to May, whose self-proclaimed "strong and stable" leadership became "weak and wobbly" due to her hubris, inability to deal with the public, and poor campaigning skills. Her robotic response to journalistic questions led to her being dubbed the "Maybot" and her decision to not engage in the available televised debates with other party leaders proved to be a major miscalculation.

Most notably, Corbyn established a para-social linkage with the wider electorate. He even became the subject of a popular chant of "Oh, Jeremy Corbyn" (to the tune of the White Stripes' hit song "Seven Nation Army"), which became an online meme and was a regular accompaniment to his appearances at campaign rallies (Seymour, 2017, p. 228). For many "Corbynistas" the result was celebrated as a "victory" with a sense of insurgency and vindication against the political and media establishment. As Pete Dorey commented:

> Corbyn's calm public demeanour, affability, the courteous, measured and generally unflustered manner in which he answered questions, and his reluctance to engage in personalised attacks on his Conservative opponents, greatly impressed many television viewers and those who saw Corbyn via social media. This did much to counter the vicious attacks on him by pro-Conservative newspapers. Indeed, some of these press attacks might inadvertently have boosted Corbyn's popularity, partly because the "calm" Corbyn who viewers saw and heard on TV bore little relation to the "extremist" Corbyn they read about in pro-Conservative papers, and partly because the sheer vitriol of the press attacks on Corbyn's character offended a British sense of "fair play."

> (Dorey, 2017)

Corbyn's appeal to younger voters was crucial. Pro-Corbyn videos were shared on Facebook along with stories drawn from the online news website The Canary and the blog Another Angry Place. Moreover, the Labour Party, via its social media presence, signed up over one million people so they could register to vote and Corbyn's Snapchat account allowed supporters to create a 1980s style arcade game, Corbyn Run, wherein "the eponymous hero took on Tories, tax dodgers, the ghost of Margaret Thatcher, and Boris Johnson on a zipline" (Seymour, 2017, p. 231).

As an outsider political leader, Corbyn was aided by his strong ties to a new generation of CP2s who similarly operated from the outside of the mainstream media. They included Grime artists who collectively formed Grime4Corbyn and included Akala, JME, Novelist,

and Stormzy. While these "urban poets" demonstrated their support within traditional news media outlets, they could more often be found in videos in discussion with Corbyn via social media platforms including YouTube and Snapchat (Watts, 2017).

Celebrity Politicians 2: Political Endorsers in the United States

CP2s have been cited as being "Performers as Representatives" who may "represent" a viewer or constituency in a broad political sense (Street, 2004). John Thompson has contended that being a "fan" has become a defining factor in modernity so that the public forms an "intimacy with distant others" such as celebrities (Thompson, 1995, p. 220). Further, the audience's capacity to consume such CP2 endorsements has exponentially increased due to the collapse in trust toward the political classes and their ability to be "in touch" with popular values. Politicized celebrities have utilized their fame to endorse candidates or propagate partisan ideologies. The celebrity endorsement of political candidates has been a "two-way" street in which a politicized star's persona may add credence to a campaign while demonstrating adherence to a party, policy, or political cause.

In American politics, film stars, musicians, and sportsmen and -women have endorsed political candidates. Obama utilized the US entertainment-politics nexus to enhance his status as a both a neophyte presidential candidate in 2008 and an incumbent in 2012. In 2008, the talk show host Oprah Winfrey launched Obama on the national scene by appearing at rallies and made him an internationally recognized figure as her show was syndicated to nearly 150 countries worldwide. She endorsed Obama via her popular monthly magazine and book clubs and helped him to mobilize political support within the African American community:

> Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Barack Obama prior to the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primary generated a statistically and qualitatively significant increase in the number of votes received as well as in the total number of votes cast. . . . In total, we estimate the endorsement was responsible for 1,015,559 votes for Obama.
>
> (Garthwaite & Moore, 2008, p. 3)

Such a distribution of votes proved crucial in the 2008 Democratic primaries as "Hillary Clinton would have garnered more votes than Obama if not for Winfrey . . . her power was great enough to help throw the nomination to her preferred candidate" (Ross, 2011, p. 412).

Celebrity Politics and Cultural Studies Within the United States and United Kingdom

In 2016, Clinton herself would receive outstanding celebrity support from the liberal Hollywood establishment and over twenty of the Forbes 100 list of highest paid US entertainers endorsed her candidacy. They included reality television socialite Kim Kardashian, who posted a "selfie" of herself with Clinton, along with popular music superstars Beyoncé, Jay-Z, and Madonna, who either invited her to appear at their concerts or appeared at her campaign rallies. Most especially, she received the endorsements of Meryl Streep, Lena Dunham, and Alicia Keys at the Democratic National Convention. In the general election campaign, Clinton appeared at a concert performed by the actress and singer Jennifer Lopez in Miami on October 29, 2016, and received donations from fundraisers hosted by George and Amal Clooney.

In the run-up to the polling date, singer Katy Perry walked out onto the platform of a Clinton rally and was accompanied by Janet Jackson's song "Nasty." This provided a hostile reference to her opponent Donald Trump's derogatory reference of Clinton as being "that nasty woman." Others proclaimed Trump to be a sexist due to the release of an audio recording of his crude statements concerning his sexual relations with women made to Billy Bush in 2005. Such celebrity criticisms of the Republican nominee reached a crescendo when the film star Robert De Niro in a Vote Your Future video provided a vehement condemnation of Trump:

> I mean he's so blatantly stupid. He's a punk, he's a dog, he's a pig, he's a con, a bullshit artist, a mutt who doesn't know what he's talking about, doesn't do his homework, doesn't care, thinks he's gaming society, doesn't pay his taxes. He's an idiot. Colin Powell said it best: He's a national disaster. He's an embarrassment to this country. It makes me so angry that this country has gotten to this point that this fool, this bozo, has wound up where he has. He talks about how he wants to punch people in the face. Well, I'd like to punch him in the face.

> (De Niro, 2016)

Alternatively, Trump received CP2 support from a more eclectic range of rock, sports, reality TV, and film stars including Gene Simmons, Kid Rock, Ted Nugent, Mike Tyson, Dennis Rodman, Hulk Hogan, Lou Ferrigno, Tila Tequila, Scott Baio, Gary Busey, and Jon Voight. Voight, the estranged father of celebrity humanitarian Angelina Jolie (who Trump had attacked on numerous occasions) and a former anti-Vietnam War counter-cultural liberal activist who had canvassed for liberal Democratic presidential nominee Senator George McGovern in 1972, engaged in an extraordinary right-wing conversion. He became involved in a public disagreement with De Niro about his comments on Trump, wrote supportive editorials wherein he criticized the fake media, and appeared at the 2017 presidential inauguration claiming that "God has answered our prayers." Finally, there was the bizarre "non" support of the rapper (and husband of Kim Kardashian) Kanye West, who proclaimed that while he did not vote he would have elected Trump and chanted "build the wall" (in relation to Trump's advocacy of building a wall along the Mexican border) at his concerts.

Celebrity Politics 2: Endorsements in the UK General Elections

The blurring of the lines between politics and entertainment has meant that CP2 endorsements have become increasingly commonplace in UK politics. In the 1997 general election, the "Blairite" spin doctor Margaret McDonagh co-opted then Creation Records' mogul Alan McGee to see if his leading band Oasis would lend itself to the cause. Thus, Oasis leader Noel Gallagher provided endorsements at awards shows, made donations, and appeared at a range of New Labour Party events (Harris, 2003, pp. 306–307). This collaboration of performers and politicians marked an American-style confluence of celebrity endorsers with the political classes. Throughout the 2001 and 2005 general elections, Blair could rely on a number of UK celebrities to endorse his leadership, although the relationship diminished after the high-point of "Cool Britannia."

However, in 2010, a revitalized Conservative campaign machinery unveiled film star Sir Michael Caine at a press conference to promote their plans for sixteen-year-olds to volunteer as National Citizens as part of the Big Society. Caine was joined by other CP2s such as Carol Vorderman, Kirstie Allsopp, Gary Barlow, and Chris Rea. Within this campaign, the Labour Party was more vociferous in its employment of celebrity endorsements when the comedian Eddie Izzard appeared in a Labour Party election broadcast (PEB) stating that a Conservative victory would be a disaster and that "Britain is Brilliant." Elsewhere, actors David Tennant and Richard Wilson provided voice-overs for Labour Party PEBs and its audio manifesto.

In the 2015, Labour Party leader Ed Miliband secured the endorsements of Izzard and Ben Elton who appeared with *Coronation Street* actress Sally Lindsay at a rally in Warrington. Izzard campaigned in over fifty constituencies and the former *Eastenders* star Ross Kemp canvassed his home constituency of Ilford North, while comic actor Steve Coogan spoke in targeted marginals, including Bermondsey, Old Southwark, Hornsey, and Wood Green. Coogan, comedienne Jo Brand, and snooker player Ronnie O'Sullivan starred in Labour Party election broadcasts concerning fairness and the National Health Service. Moreover, actor Martin Freeman appeared in the party's first PEB (with a voice-over by David Tennant) to promote social justice. Labour also received the backing of Stephen Hawking, Paul O'Grady, Sir Ian McKellen, Mathew Horne, Robert Webb, Charlotte Church, and Delia Smith.

Some celebrities facilitated a populist response to the party's leadership. The anticorporate comedian Russell Brand, who had decried voting, interviewed Miliband on his YouTube channel The Trews, which had a million subscribers. The Labour leader spoke to Brand about the inequities of global capitalism, the protection of working rights, media owners, and the lasting value of voting. When Cameron castigated "Milibrand" as a joke, the Labour strategists misguidedly hoped that Brand's endorsement with his 9.5 million Twitter followers could provide a conduit to young, disengaged voters. In the

event, Milibrand, along with the large stone tablet that included six electoral pledge signed off by Miliband that became known as the "Edstone," proved to be a major misstep. Subsequently, the Labour Party limited celebrity endorsements in 2017 with the exception of the support of Grime artists, singer Kate Nash, writer Martin Rosen, and the actresses Maxine Peake and Julie Hesmondhalgh. Instead, Corbyn responded "I just want endorsement from the public—the many, not the few" (Watts, 2017).

Celebrity Activism: Causes and Issue-Based Politics

CP2s have also been positioned at the interface of causal-based activity, social engagement and cultural practice. Consequently, they have raised public awareness concerning local, national, and international campaigns that have existed outside of the purview of partisan-based politics. In the United States, CP2s have become patrons, advocates, and fundraisers for a multitude of causes including humanitarianism, injustice, the environmental movement, public health, and education reforms. They have lobbied Congress and state legislatures and engaged in direct action to bring attention to social movements. In turn, as UK celebrity culture has grown, there has been an accompanying rise in star activism in public health, residence rights, and fundraising campaigns.

Hollywood stars have most visibly attached themselves to the causes of environmentalism and conservation. Such activity has resulted in raising awareness, the setting up of foundations, the production of documentaries, and direct action. In 1999, the film star Woody Harrelson joined protesters on the Golden Gate Bridge and briefly owned an oxygen bar, O2, in Los Angeles. Leonardo DiCaprio has both produced and starred in the documentaries, *The 11th Hour* (2006) and *Before the Flood* (2016), which concerned climate change. In the latter, he went on an emotional personal journey as a United Nations Ambassador of Peace to describe the impact of pollution. The film's director Fisher Stevens commented, "we wanted Leo to meet the experts and make the experts more palatable, so that everyone could understand them" (G'Sell, 2016).

Subsequently, these forms of CP2 behavior have taken root in modern British politics. Traditionally, UK celebrities preferred to engage in charitable activities, such as the late Lord Brian Rix who retired from acting to become the president of the Royal Mencap Society in 1980. Yet, as celebrity culture has become more endemic, CP2s have used their fame as a platform to mobilize public interest in campaigns. In 2005, the television Chef Jamie Oliver's Feed Me Better campaign placed the improvement of nutritional values of school dinners on the policy agenda. This occurred as a result of his documentary series *Jamie's School Dinners* for Channel Four, which was designed to educate the public about children's eating habits and the dangers of obesity.

Due to the program's popularity and the public's support for the campaign, former Prime Minister Blair promised to improve school meals shortly after it was aired. Moreover, Oliver met with education ministers and delivered 271,677 signatures to Downing Street on March 30, 2005, drawn from an online petition on his website. Subsequently, with varying degrees of success and opposition from recalcitrant parents, Oliver has been an instrumental figure in reforming children's menus and has used his status to promote healthier diets.

Increasingly, US CP2s have attracted attention due to their ability to generate controversy. A tradition of outspoken politicized celebrities emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as in the cases of Jane Fonda and Harry Belafonte. After being dubbed "Hanoi Jane," Fonda focused her attention on feminist and gender equality causes. However, despite a growing public standing, she continued to be vilified by the conservative right. In tandem, Belafonte has remained a divisive figure. He declared President George W. Bush to be a war criminal and then Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice as "field hands." He was highly critical of Barack Obama's presidency claiming "I find nothing in his policies . . . that speaks to the issues of the disenfranchised" (Ross, 2011, p. 225).

The controversial nature of CP2 behavior has been most significantly debated in relation to questions about humanitarianism. This has occurred in wake of the dramatic rise in celebrity philanthro-capitalism, which was most fully realized in Sir Bob Geldof's emotive response to the famines in Ethiopia with the initial creation of Band Aid, the release of the "Feed the World" charity single, and the *Live Aid* global concerts in 1985. His globally televised *Live Aid* shows reconfigured the public's attitude toward charities by demonstrating that fundraising could be desirable. Geldof and fellow Irishman U2 lead singer Bono have been either praised as altruistic figures, who have brought international attention to the plight of many in global southern states (Cooper, 2008), or exploiters of "poverty porn," who engage the West's neo-colonial rule (Kapoor, 2012).The criticisms have gone hand-in-hand with the concerns that celebrities are either effectively engaging in the political process or bringing into question political efficacy in modern democracies.

Donald Trump as a Celebrity Turned Politician

Celebrities engaging in politics can bring guile and persuasiveness in using the media, which may invigorate politics with new ideas. Ellis Cashmore has noted that celebrities have assumed a worth that was "once associated with sages or charismatic leaders" (Cashmore, 2006, p. 218). Moreover, as social media has grown exponentially, film, music, and television stars have used their fame to mediate "a more expansive conception of political capital" (Coleman, 2007, p. 15).Consequently, a growing number of CP2s have become party candidates, have been elected, and have taken up positions of political responsibility.

Celebrity Politics and Cultural Studies Within the United States and United Kingdom

Undoubtedly, the most marked expression of this phenomenon has occurred in the United States due to the close political affiliations between the American entertainment, sports, and political communities. Ronald Reagan's ascendancy from a "B" film actor to an American president (1981–1989) represented a career trajectory that had been instituted by the former Hollywood song and dance man George Murphy when he became the Republican Senator of California in 1964 (Ross, 2011, pp. 163–170). More recently, other US celebrities including Clint Eastwood, Jesse Ventura, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sonny Bono, Fred Thompson, and Al Franken have won mayoral, gubernatorial, congressional, and senatorial elections.

However, the apotheosis of this phenomenon occurred in the 2016 presidential election when the celebrity property tycoon Donald Trump successfully ran for office. The controversial Trump developed a campaign in which there was a convergence of social media, celebrity, and political leadership. He achieved a unique brand of charismatic authority and developed his "affective capacity" to engage with a core base of electoral supporters. The scion of a wealthy family and born into privilege, Trump benefited from (inter)national name recognition that began in the 1970s thanks to his business empire, which includes real estate, casinos, resorts and golf courses, books, and beauty pageants. His apparent business prowess meant that in 2011 the net worth of the Trump brand was valued at $200 billion (although his actual worth is heavily disputed and he failed to release his tax returns). His private life, with numerous wives and examples of cuckolding, had also been subject to intense public scrutiny in celebrity gossip columns and entertainment programs (Kellner, 2016).

From 2004 Trump had starred in NBC's reality television show *The Apprentice*, which aired for 14 seasons. This extremely popular television show provided a contrived narrative wherein extremely aggressive business neophytes competed in a series of weekly challenges as a heightened form of social Darwinism. Those who failed to deliver their goals were eliminated when Trump barked the strap-line, "You're fired." The show enhanced Trump's reputation as a powerful tycoon who the hopefuls would appease to retain his good will. Further, the prize for the winner was to become an "apprentice" in Trump's business empire. *The Apprentice* also included several celebrity seasons in which, among others, the former UK newspaper editor Piers Morgan was featured as a successful contestant. As Naomi Klein has argued, it was a "capitalist burlesque" that:

> was explicitly about the race to survive in the cutthroat jungle of late capitalism. . . . Play your cards right and be the one lucky winner, or suffer the abject humiliation of being berated and then fired by the boss. . . . Trump and Mark Burnett, the producer, delivered the coup de grâce: They turned the act of firing people into mass entertainment.

> (Klein, 2017)

In addition, Trump was associated with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and appeared on eight televised occasions to earn a place in the WWE Hall of Fame. In the infamous "Battle of the Billionaires," he pretended to fight WWE owner Vince McMahon. He celebrated his "victory" by shaving McMahon's head in front of the frenzied crowd while throwing thousands of dollars at them. Later it would be shown that McMahon had substantively contributed to Trump's campaign funds. Trump's celebrity within reality television programming has been such that he received a star in the Hollywood Boulevard "Walk of Fame."

Thus, in the years leading up to his presidential campaign, Trump enhanced his celebrity status and recognition as a brand. This meant that throughout the primaries and the general election campaigns he received national and global attention, dominating the discussion on mainstream media and significantly taking away the oxygen from the other Republican contenders in the polls. The traditional US media presented Trump as a political outsider, emphasized his business experience, and underlined his outrageous and oversized narcissistic "personality" as a key point of connection with voters.

In tandem, Trump and his political ally and later campaign coordinator Steve Bannon (who served as his chief advisor in the White House and continues to run the alt-right Brietbart News) channeled his personal and public outrageousness to focus the campaign on his nativist anti-immigrant sentiments and populist fears about the "clash of civilizations" against Islam. Trump rallied against the "fake news" of major news networks such as CNN and liberal newspapers including the *New York Times*. The Trump campaign provided a deliberate conflation of lies with the truth to rail against the political (in particular, Hillary Clinton) and the media establishment. In this respect, Trump was aided and abetted by the deployment of the social media within the heart of campaign (Ball, 2017).

Trump's Voice and Output: Twitter, Outrage, and Charismatic Authority in 140 Characters

Trump's 2016 campaign developed his online presence by reaching out to an electoral base via social media. Further hybridity occurred between Trump's media stardom, his construction of a social movement, and his utilization of charismatic demagoguery across the Internet. He used many obvious techniques (direct address, polling audiences, posting pictures with his family and behind-the-scenes information). However, Trump's most notable online contributions occurred via Twitter, where he posted comments on a daily basis about his right-wing political views, the success of his campaign, and the "unfair" coverage he received in the mainstream media.

Trump's Twitter handle itself—@realDonaldTrump—directly communicated the idea that the content he presented was genuine and unfiltered so he could speak to a broader social movement. He used Twitter to weaponize his campaign, to point out the alleged fakery of others, and to position himself as an honest, plain-spoken, unfiltered foil, whose brash sincerity and unapologetic vehemence stood as a pillar of his brand. Twitter enabled Trump to provide a public voice with an increasingly disaffected public when he claimed he would "drain the swamp" within the Washington beltway.

As an outsider "businessman" Trump rallied against the elites and special interests, while maximizing his own personal and financial attributes to build up reciprocal relations with his online audiences who enjoyed his reactionary populism. Consequently, it was Trump the maverick billionaire capitalist, who had never stood for any other political office, who managed to present himself as the "antiestablishment" candidate by blackening his media critics, Republican Party primary opponents such as Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, and ultimately the Democratic nominee—"Crooked" Hillary Clinton. Therefore, through such "authenticity" he established a deep and rooted connection with the Rust-Belt electorate who felt they had been ignored and betrayed by the political and media establishments.

Trump used his hybrid media/digital presence to enhance his personal brand, which had been created via the tropes of Reality TV, Gossip Columns, and Talk Radio, to establish a form of political capital with the American public. Trump provided an expression of celebrity leadership via the interface of social media platforms with his outrageous media performances throughout the primary and election debates, alongside campaign rallies where he rallied his supporters by claiming he would imprison Clinton. He successfully propelled his candidacy through a purposefully controversial social media performance in which he engaged in outlandish and hateful commentary.

An early example of Trump's Twitter "performance" was evident when he engaged in a sexist and derogatory attack upon the ex-Fox New Presenter and Republican Party primary debate moderator Megyn Kelly. Previously, she had had the temerity of being critical of his political grandstanding, so Trump tweeted, and "I refuse to call Megyn Kelly a bimbo, because that would not be politically correct. Instead I will only call her a lightweight reporter!"

Throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump mastered Twitter unlike any other presidential candidate before him by unleashing its power as a tool of political promotion, distraction, score-settling, and hateful attack. In the process, he fulfilled the fantasies of social media avatars who had predicted a White House candidacy that would replace the expensive conventions of political communication with a campaign that emphasized the urgent and visceral nature of social media. As Trump has shown, within online modern political campaigns there has been a recurring focus on an imagery that gives "voice" to the irrational and projects an ego that seeks constant attention:

If we're talking about them, [he is] winning the war for attention. No one knows this better than Trump. Prod the social-media tiger, you get attention: say Mexicans are rapists, make fun of the disabled, pick a fight with the Pope, attack women, call the media dumb, and social media shines a big, bright spotlight on Donald.

(Bilton, 2016)

Therefore, Trump used his celebrity capital as a base to change the parameters of social media campaigning with his negative, aggressive, and hateful employment of Twitter, which reflect his para-social relationship with the American public. By lashing out at his political opponents and using cruel humor, he positioned himself as the antiestablishment candidate who regularly tweeted his contempt of the political elite to directly speak to and activate a disaffected electoral base.

In his first year of office, Trump continued to employ Twitter to denigrate his opponents and apparent allies, to rail against the "fake news" agenda while using social media to engage within it, and to deflect attention away from his own political failings. For example, on November 30, 2017, he retweeted three anti-Islamic videos posted by Jayda Fransen, the deputy leader of the far-right hate group "Britain First." In response, UK Prime Minister Theresa May's office responded that he had been wrong to do so. However, Trump fired back: "Theresa @theresamay, don't focus on me, focus on the destructive Radical Islamic Terrorism that is taking place within the United Kingdom. We are doing just fine!" (Smith, 2017). In accordance, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders defended Trump in typical post-truth fashion by stating that while the anti-Muslim videos were faked, the sentiment was correct. Despite causing a diplomatic uproar, Trump characteristically refused to apologize and again demonstrated how he had used Twitter to circumvent traditional political and media gatekeepers. In such a manner, he has been able to construct a hybrid social media and news agenda in which he maintains the public spotlight upon himself to emphasize his authenticity to his supporters.

Celebrity Politics and Democratic Values

Throughout this analysis it has been noted that celebrity activists and celebrities who have become politicians are becoming more conscious of their influence in an era of the electronic mediation of communications. In tandem, politicians have incorporated the values of celebrity within the forms of political imagery they have developed. Thus, such a celebritization of politics has brought about alternative forms of political engagement that indicate cultural changes in the concepts of citizenship and participation.

Celebrity Politics and Cultural Studies Within the United States and United Kingdom

Contemporary political elites have drawn on the various forms of fame and renown that have segued into a range of political advertising options as elections have been fought out on television and are now being contested within social media. Whereas image candidates had previously incorporated elements of celebrity into their personas, CP1s have utilized elements of performance, branding, public relations, and perceived forms of authenticity to affect the representation of their political characters. Similarly, the audience's capacity to consume celebrity activities has increased due to the collapse in trust toward the political classes and as CP2s have realized their value as "politicians-without-office" (Cashmore, 2006, p. 218). This has been extended as celebrities have contested high political offices in modern elections.

John Street's arguments that celebrity politics gives a greater expression to the representation of democratic behavior are persuasive. In particular, Street asks whether celebrities can reinvigorate politics with an aggregated form of political agency. He is concerned about the connection celebrities can make with the public through their ability to be "in touch" with popular sentiment. This has been mediated through "fandom" in which an "intimacy with distant others" can be understood as the basis of political representation. Street contends that such a representational relationship is established by the "affective capacity" of the celebrities and modern politicians' cultural performances. As celebrities and image candidates assume the authority to promote political agendas, they have become significant actors in election campaigns, policy agendas, and activism.

These concerns segue into a wider debate about the dynamics that are shaping postdemocratic societies. Here it is contended that traditional civic duties are being replaced by alternative forms of participation. Within this new political environment, different types of agency, such as celebrity politics, have become centrifugal forces for public engagement. These changes have occurred in line with Ervin Goffman's concept of dramatic realization. For an actor to become meaningful to others, he "must mobilize his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey" (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). Thus, the private self that Goffman describes as existing *backstage* has been subsumed through a constant performativity in which the public figure's "real" self is defined by performance styles and audience reactions. To this end, "authenticity" has become a key political variable.

Wheeler (2012, 2013) asks whether celebrity politicians can "input" aggregated forms of "agency" to affect political outcomes. Celebrity politics must not only be seen to have social value but needs to provide the conditions through which a transformation in democratic behavior may occur. For CP1s and CP2s to have a democratic worth they should demonstrate ideological substance and provide clarity in establishing a fixed range of meanings upon which people may achieve a real sense of connection with political causes. Therefore, such forms of activity should provide a basis for citizens who wish to participate in terms of their own political efficacy to define a wider sense of the common good.

However, as a corollary, these CP forms of political behavior must be considered in relation to the ideological content of the campaigns and be situated in relation to the ongoing events. Most recently, the outcomes drawn from these forms of political performance have challenged the prevailing norms of political communications and are being contested in terms of their democratic worth. Finally, it should be remembered that celebrity politics is operating within the context of a new and unpredictable variable—the social media—which is becoming the key information resource wherein democratic values are contested. These concerns are characterized by the advent of "post-truth politics" as much as they are proving to be a means for the presentation of authenticity.

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Notes:

(1.) This article focuses on celebrity in terms of politicians and politicized celebrities within the United States and United Kingdom. As it suggests, this is an important subset of ongoing trends within political communications and the ubiquity of celebrity across the Global Northern information environment. It should be noted that an extensive literature has emerged in relation to feminist celebrity studies, the issue of race and celebrity (e.g., Diane Negra, Su Holmes, Sarah Projansky, Raka Shome, Diana Holmes). For further details, see Brand Bollywood Care: Celebrity, Charity and Vernacular Cosmopolitansm, by Pramod K. Nayar, in *A Companion to Celebrity*, P. David Marshall & Sean Redmond, 2015. These studies have been accompanied by significant work on celebrity humanitarianism, globalization, and southern states. See, for instance, *Celebrity Humanitarianism and North-South Relations*, by Lisa Ann Richey, 2016, New York: Routledge, and *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development*, by Dan Brockington, 2014, New York: Routledge. Further, in Richey's edited volume there is a good analysis of celebrity activism in non-Western contexts.

(2.) The journal *Celebrity Studies* has legitimized the study of celebrities. It has produced a special edition cultural studies report and additional short articles on non-Western celebrity engagement. For further details, see Non-western Celebrity Politics and Diplomacy: An Introduction, by A. F. Cooper, H. Dobson, and M. Wheeler, *Celebrity Studies, 8*(2), 312–317.

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