

LIGHTS, CAMERA, VOTE:
AN AGENDA-SETTING ANALYSIS OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS AND
NEWS CORRELATION DURING THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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This project is dedicated to:

My parents - Richard and Karen Jacobsen

Thank you for your constant encouragement and love. Thank you for challenging me, inspiring me and never letting me quit. Thank you for listening and believing in my visions of grandeur. I am so grateful for the opportunities to receive a Christian education and for the sacrifices you make for me on a daily basis. I am amazed by the both of you, by your hard work and faithfulness to the Lord. I could not have accomplished this without you both cheering me on. I love you guys! Here's to the next big accomplishment!

*“For God has not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” – 2 Timothy 1:7*

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“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”- Romans 12:2

Abstract

Many studies have been done in order to prove the idea that celebrity endorsements can affect elections; however little research has exposed the ongoing correlation between entertainment and news media in America. This research investigates the strong correlation between entertainment websites and mainstream news websites during the 2012 United States presidential election by way of celebrity endorsements. The sources examined included celebrity, entertainment journalism sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *People* and E! as compared to networks; ABC News, NBC News, Fox News, CNN and CBS News. Twelve celebrities were chosen by means of their given Q Score. Their announced endorsement for a particular candidate was examined in each entertainment publication. By using a qualitative content analysis, the researcher was able to draw conclusions, record trends and make observations based on each endorsement. This paper gives insight to the reader on how entertainment culture influences our daily news and ultimately our elections.

Key Words: agenda-setting, endorsements, celebrity, election, journalism, voters, Q Score, qualitative, analysis, media.

Lights, Camera, Vote: An Agenda-Setting Analysis of Celebrity Endorsements and News
Correlation during the 2012 Presidential Election

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As the study of mass communication continues, the agenda setting theory has become a vital part of the media's vocabulary. Not only is this term being heard more often, we are bombarded with the thought that this theory is being put to use in today's journalism practices in America.

Journalism is the leading basis for this increasingly influential theory but more specifically, celebrity journalism. Americans have seen the rise and popularity of the celebrity culture otherwise known as the celebrity following. Some are fascinated while others are left shocked at how much of an influence and credibility young adults are giving today's celebrities.

In 2012, America's presidential election gave us a first-hand look at the power of a celebrity endorsement. The problem here is agenda-setting theory being put to practice right before the viewers' eyes, or to be more specific, behind the viewers' backs. A long line of research clearly demonstrates that the news dictates what is important to America. Jeongsub describes it as: "Major national newspapers could respond to a national breaking story and to a local breaking story in a consistent way, such as ignoring them or by following them...when a major national newspaper covers breaking news, readers will seek these stories" (227).

This study will look at a 24-hour timeline that brings to light the correlation beyond just magazines but in celebrity entertainment journalism and major news media. The timeline goes as follows: celebrities publicly announce that they are supporting one candidate over another, and journalism outlets such as E! Network, *People* or *The Huffington Post* pick up the story and broadcast it, allowing other hard news outlets such

as Fox, CNN, ABC, NBC and other networks, to promote the story as what we call 'headlining news.'

Previous studies such as Pease and Brewer, have studied the effects of endorsements, such as Oprah's 2008 support for Barack Obama, on presidential elections. Other studies such as Nownes (2011) have brought to light the significance of endorsements to the voting patterns of American citizens. Another contribution by Couldry and Markham (2007) considered the bridge celebrity culture is building for young adults from itself to politics and news media. Thus, different areas of celebrity journalism effects have been previously studied but none have considered the 2012 presidential election as a prime example. Also, the correlation from entertainment news outlets to major news outlets has yet to be determined by researchers. Evidently, previous studies have not studied an overall look at the 2012 presidential election while determining the possible correlation between entertainment and hard news.

This study will answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does correlation exist between specific celebrities' endorsement articles being picked up before, the same day or after the entertainment sources?

RQ2: Does celebrity journalism by way of presidential endorsements influence hard news coverage?

The analysis completed by the researcher hopes to play a significant role in speaking to young voters and future voters in America concerning the power of the entertainment media to influence their political views and ultimately, their voting choices. The study will also appeal to any American by bringing this awareness to an even larger voting public concerning links between entertainment media and voting

behavior. With use of the agenda-setting theory, this study will attempt to apply agenda-setting theory in order to demonstrate the important role that entertainment news plays in the generation of today's news agenda.

The following literature review will examine related sources, which pertain to the topics of celebrity journalism, endorsements, agenda-setting theory, and American politics. The researcher's methodology will then follow with specific details and guidelines for the proposed study, along with a concluding summary of the overall study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Agenda-Setting in Journalism

Agenda-setting theory continues to be an explanatory staple in the mass media industry. This theory, also known as The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media, first originated by Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1972. McCombs and Shaw proposed: “The power of the news media to set a nation’s agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news” (McCombs).

In other words, this theory suggests that the media place higher importance on certain news stories in order to convince the viewers that these stories deserve more attention than others. In 2007 an article written by Drezner on celebrity activists and agenda setting concluded “But today, the power of soft news has given stars new leverage. Their rising clout has had much to do with how we consume information as it does with the celebrities themselves. Cable television, talk radio and weblogs have radically diversified the news sources available to Americans.”

Some may say that a secret relationship exists between journalists and celebrities; Saltzman in “Celebrity Journalism and Politics” argues that this relationship no longer exists off camera but clearly on camera also. Celebrities, with the help of journalists, are influencing which issues we should place importance on. In a 2012 study, results found the media seem to set the agenda for how teen girls gossip about celebrities on a day-to-day basis (Schuh).

Gary Whannel, a leading academic thinker, developed the term “vortextuality” in describing the grip media outlets have in controlling the audience. He describes the origin as: “The growth in the range of media outlets, and the vastly increased speed of circulation of information have combined to create the phenomenon of a ‘vortex’ effect” (65-71). He later explains with this statement:

Various media constantly feed off each other and, in an era of electronic and digital information exchange, the speed at which this happens has become very rapid. Certain super-major events come to dominate the headlines to such an extent that it becomes temporarily difficult for columnists and commentators to discuss anything else. They are drawn in, as if by a vortex (Whannel 65).

Enric Castello in “Journalists, Reframing and Party Public Relations Consultants” wrote on agenda-setting in the political realm but instead labeled journalists as “reframers.” He describes journalists as writers having to meet daily demands so this results in a “strong” or a “weak” reframing process in order to sell the story. Castello explains:

Reframing refers to the capacity of journalists to turn on the media frame and to read, understand, contextualize, and transform the meanings of precooked messages coming mainly from the input of PR managers and spin doctors. Thus, our position in this debate is that media power is not restricted to selecting and transmitting frames but is actively involved in the configuration and reconfiguration of frames. This function is especially evident in political communication processes... (508)

Instead of news coverage being changed or altered to demands, Castello tells his readers that stories are being reframed with parameters that only include certain aspects in which they sense are important (506-521).

In a study completed in 2011 by Valenzuela on agenda-setting within newsrooms, he suggested that not everyone is subject to agenda-setting norms. He states that the idea in which people's judgments about the relevance and uncertainty about issues is correlated with their acceptance or rejection of the media agenda. The author goes against the current to state that the audience is stronger than theories have suggested, and ultimately is not always susceptible to media such as the hypodermic needle theory, in which the audience is labeled as victims of media trends (437-463).

From a historical perspective, Petley reminds us that the term "Fourth Estate" was first spoken of by Edmund Burke in 1787 during a parliamentary debate on press reporting. Petley describes the fourth estate as: "a central component of democracy and a means whereby the power of the state can be monitored and, if necessary, limited" (68). A strong point for the author is that this statement of a fourth branch of government will continue to hold true for years to come as long as members of the press corps are both professionally and morally grounded.

Although Michael Cornfield, in his writing in 1992, does not refer to agenda-setting theory, he suggests in his writing that media is a "fourth branch of government." Cornfield tells of functional analysts, those who set policy agendas, who keep the gate through which people enter and exit and ultimately create a reality to which the audience responds. He goes on to state that anyone who trusts the agenda-setting function must ultimately view individuals in our society as those who would rather "refer" rather than

“respond.” In other words, the audience is quick to listen, but slow to action when it comes to speaking up on issues in media.

Two articles studied were those of Conway and Boczkowski, in which both authors argue agenda-setting is most effective by means of how the audience receives and reads their news. Conway says participants in his study had a higher recall for television news compared to online news that is read, meaning the audience will easily remember news that is seen, rather than read in a newspaper or online (43). On the other hand, Boczkowski says news stories are typically displayed more frequently by how many individuals have read the specific articles (869). This means the sharing, promoting, and gossip of stories will quickly circulate and legitimize the media’s story. Both authors support the idea that the newer generation tends to be more visual learners and most often do not research beyond their means while reading the news online.

The Power of Political Celebrity Endorsements

In America today voters cannot go through one presidential election without hearing about a particular celebrity endorsement; celebrities now speak at conventions, participate in endorsement commercials or make statements to major networks as to why they support one candidate over another. No matter where individuals go in the media, news will break about what celebrities are funding and what they are taking a stand for. All of this spoken controversy and debate is for this one presidential candidate who they consider, in their own opinion, the best for America.

While voters feel they have power over their choice, celebrity journalism can have power over America’s political system. Voters are too often blindly at risk of being swayed by a celebrity announcing their endorsement for a candidate. David Marsh and

his colleagues in “Celebrity Politics” tackle this question by suggesting there is little or no systematic approach to studying any direct effect on news. He writes: “In essence, celebrity activists and advocates are leaders whose followers may be far more interested in the individual and his or her creative product than in also supporting his or her chosen cause” (331). Marsh instead argues that celebrities can strongly affect other political arenas such as Oprah and the 2008 election, and the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign in 2005. “... The strong amplification that celebrity voices receive in the public discourse may crowd out the perspectives provided by other, less famous interlocutors” (332).

Inthorn and Street take a different approach by studying the way in which young adults view political professionals. “Old, serious, rich and male,” were key words used to describe such individuals in the view of young voters (4). These young voters, who are often intimidated by government, see celebrity endorsements as an alternative to formal government. As pointed out by Inthorn and Street, this can be a positive outcome for what often seems confusing and even frustrating for the young voter today. In 2012, John Street found similar results from research to describe areas in which celebrities create a way for individuals to communicate with their politicians. He referenced the 2008 election of President Obama, when it seemed nearly impossible for a line to be drawn between politics and celebrities. Every part of Obama’s campaign was immersed with celebrities, whether in performances or television ads. There were also appearances and speeches made by supporting celebrities such as Jamie Foxx or Tom Hanks. Street pointed out, “It was almost impossible to tell where the show business ended and the politics began” (346).

Brubaker in “It Doesn’t Affect my Vote,” describes the line between Hollywood and Washington being non-existent (5). Brubaker pointed out that celebrities and politicians are ultimately working hand in hand, where a politician may be credible and not well liked while celebrities are well liked and are not very credible. Brubaker finds that people often believe that they are not as susceptible to persuasive messages as the general public. They feel that they have information unavailable to other people; others are susceptible because they do not know what we know (7). It is easy for a person to say they can be affected by endorsements, although some can be affected due to their lack of knowledge on a subject.

A study completed in early 2013 found that the images celebrities portray are better accepted when positive images towards celebrity activism are already maintained. If a voter does not agree with celebrity endorsements, they will continue to be unaffected by the endorsements around them (De los Salmenes 106). A study completed after the 2004 presidential campaign also supported this idea. The authors wanted to find out if young voters in the 18-24 age group are affected by the endorsements such as the get-out-the-vote campaigns. The course of the study looked into levels of complacency and involvement. Results showed that young voters feel higher levels of complacency when they become more involved and therefore suggest that these campaigns can potentially influence positive change in political engagement among younger citizens.

Anthony Nownes took a different approach by writing on voters and political parties. He stated that young voters might not feel the need to vote after viewing a celebrity endorsement for a particular party but this may ultimately change their view of political parties in a positive way (497). His study among specific celebrities show that

young voters may feel stronger about their decision for a certain candidate when they hear their favorite celebrity also supports that particular candidate.

In 2008 Payne wrote about the 2004 election and what we could expect for the 2008 election concerning celebrity endorsements. The author suggests that young voters will continue to get their electoral news from entertainment shows such as *The Daily Show*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* or *The Late Show with David Letterman*. This finding supports Inthorn and Street's earlier study in which young voters feel intimidated by the election process and are turning to easier routes to understand it all and ultimately make their decision. Payne suggested candidates need to be considered credible in the eyes of young voters in order to "improve the quality of political dialogue" (1245).

In 2012, Morin declared:

The successful manipulation of the celebrity endorser credibility factor, coupled with a consistent lack of effects of the celebrity endorser credibility and sex factors on attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intent regarding the endorsed candidate, suggests that for both male and female endorsers, differences in celebrity endorser credibility do not influence how participants feel, think, or behave toward an endorsed candidate (418).

The apparent indifference to credibility suggests it is crucial for the young voter to consider all aspects of celebrity endorsements, why they might affect their vote and what the endorsement's message is.

Oprah's Endorsement

Celebrity endorsements prominently came to attention during the 2008 election when television host Oprah Winfrey announced her pick for the presidential race. The

simple words from Winfrey, “He’s the one,” sparked major controversy and are still talked about to this day. Studies found that in areas where there were greater concentrations of Oprah Winfrey fans, Barack Obama enjoyed a higher level of electoral success.

Pease and Brewer, for example, “find an ‘Oprah effect.’ Using experimental data, they find that although Oprah’s endorsement had no impact on how much respondents liked Barack Obama, it did affect their views of Obama’s viability as a candidate. Specifically, respondents who learned of Oprah’s endorsement viewed Obama as more likely to win than did respondents who did not learn of Oprah’s endorsement. Perhaps more importantly, the endorsement also led exposed respondents to say that they were more likely to vote for Obama (386).

Calculating the direct electoral impact of her endorsement is no easy task. After Oprah’s 2007 endorsement, one survey found that 23% of Democrats reported they would cast their ballot for Obama solely on Oprah’s stamp of approval. (Pease and Brewer 393) Later in 2008, a page-turning study conducted by Garthwaite and Moore showed staggering results. The study considered the impact of Oprah’s endorsement by means of an economics-based discussion of her magazine and book club sales. Results concluded that her endorsement accounted for roughly one million additional votes for Obama.

Another study by Pease and Brewer showed just the opposite; this time it reported that voting participants were not influenced by favorable opinions of Obama. The results concluded that with such exposure it did not make him more likely to win the election

with Oprah on his side. Ultimately, the participant's prior favorable views of Oprah likely influenced their opinion on the election (390).

Political Parties as Brands

Many sources of literature have supported the theory that when celebrities choose a political party, to the viewer, it is more than just picking a side. Celebrities cause political parties to become brands that young voters have come to support and stand by. Chris Hedges views this in a more negative light but nonetheless explains Obama as "becoming a global celebrity, who was molded easily into a brand" and describes celebrity culture as "leaching" into every aspect of our culture (33).

Author Mickey Kaus called the celebrity-politics plague "celebritics." Here he is not referring to the old-fashioned type where celebrities are brought in to glitz up a rally or other political event, but the new type, where the celebrity 'is' the political event. "Celebritics is when the celebrities become so powerful that they frame the issues and run the campaigns themselves, dispensing with the boring old politicians altogether." (1986) The ongoing popularity of celebrity culture and the continuing importance of America's elections will show voters the strong correlation between celebrities and politicians.

In an article entitled "MySpace to Your Space," the author, Madore describes the relationship between candidates and celebrities being marketed. There exists a correlation between Internet use and increased political participation among young voters (2). This is especially true for how celebrities are taking to social media sites in order to announce their support for a specific candidate. By announcing their support on Twitter, celebrities work to create their own brand and also a brand for the candidate. All celebrities voting

for Romney and those voting for Obama are put into categories and ultimately branded for being a follower of that particular candidate.

A study concluded by Veer resulted in the idea that political parties are to target those citizens do not actively engage with politics. The use of celebrity endorsements would make a significant impact on those targeted, given the results of the research. Evidence suggests that celebrity endorsements would be more beneficial for those who do not closely follow politics, particularly for young voters in the 18-25 year age range (437).

From 1980 to 1986, Stout and Moon sampled close to 700 magazine advertisements from *Reader's Digest*, *Newsweek*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Esquire*. They found that celebrity endorsements occurred in about half of the advertisements. Endorsers most used were celebrities (51%), typical consumers (24%), CEOs (14%), and experts (11%). A significant relationship was found between the type of endorser featured and the product category advertised during that time. Evidence shows that advertisements with celebrities involved have only increased as time has gone on and viewers rarely see CEOs endorsing products anymore.

A recurring theme within celebrity endorsements is the question of who is endorsing who? In recent presidential elections we have seen a switching of roles within endorsements. Although there is no distinct evidence of celebrities asking for support from candidates, celebrities are assisting parties as much as candidates are helping the celebrity image. A 2010 study challenged readers by stating that when a consumer thinks about a brand, an endorser mindset is activated and the consumer's evaluation of the endorser transfers to the brand unintentionally. The underlying assumption is that the

links between a celebrity and a brand are direct, equal and usually positive. However, in reality each consumer has their own associations derived from his or her personal experiences. Therefore the associations being transferred resemble a cloud of meanings - fuzzy, unpredictable and difficult to control (Halenon-Knight & Hurmerinta 454).

Survey data suggested that those who predominantly follow celebrity culture are usually the least engaged in politics and least expected to use their social networks to involve themselves in action or discussion about public-type issues.

None of this means that celebrity culture is considered 'bad,' but it challenges suggestions of how popular culture might contribute to effective democracy. Conclusions drawn by many studies suggest that individuals may often feel very negative about their celebrity-following tendencies, whereas for others it is a site of assembly within a wider audience (Couldry 411). This, in turn, allows a correlation to exist between the popularity of celebrity journalism and everyday news.

Readership and Celebrity Journalism

Celebrity endorsements have been successful due in part to the avid readership and following of celebrity journalism existing in the United States. In 1985, Neil Postman saw a shift in news and stated: "Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials." (92). It is also significant to consider that many of the celebrities being followed, such as British royal couple Will and Kate, are not even Americans but yet are in the forefront of entertainment culture today. Drake and Miah describe it best:

The various kinds of celebrities--celebrity chefs, reality television performers, star athletes--and the places in which they perform provide audiences with a complex and differing set of relationships and points of identification, even if they tend to be united by how they are mediated with a constructed sense of intimacy and address (using conventions such as the point-of-view shot in cinema and the personal mode of address in radio). Media celebrities thus offer us forms of “para-social” interaction, para-social in that they reproduce the effect of a relationship between performer and audience despite being a predominantly one-way flow of communication (49).

Celebrity readership is not always considered in a positive light. In a 2009 study, celebrity drug arrests and DUIs were receiving substantial attention in news headlines over the last decade. Conclusions from the study speak on how media attention to these unfortunate events is a missed opportunity to speak to the public. Attention is solely given to the celebrity instead of the avoidable situation. In other words, media encouragement and lesson learning should be incorporated in journalism (Smith 259).

Consistently, women’s readership of tabloids, gossip magazines and specifically women’s magazines, are setting the tone for celebrity readership. In 2010, Wilson discussed how magazines are successful:

Cashing in on the higher revenues that accompany the exploitation “younger and hipper” mainstream female audiences, celebrity gossip peddlers are pleased to dissociate themselves from the connotations of tabloid “trash” and to push a new image of the gossip reader- that are now educated, upwardly mobile, young, fashionable, female, etc (25).

It is safe to say that most women keep up with celebrity gossip, whether they aim to or not. Celebrity news is everywhere, in newspapers, headlines of major news networks and in fashion magazines, featuring celebrities as trend-setters. There is no escape from the updates and news features taken from the happening lives of celebrities.

With celebrity updates being as frequent as they are, Scott Maier considered the move from newspapers to online news outlets. He found: “on average about six in ten of the top news stories on news websites correspond with the storylines found on the front pages of newspapers, national television or on the radio.” (556-57) He ended by saying that online news media offer greater news breadth than any other media sector. With young adults being as immersed as they are with the Internet and upcoming technologies, it is no wonder they are the ones delving into celebrity journalism; they cannot help but come across these headlines.

Although the online platform continually exists, Hussain argues that news videos compete with political, entertainment and citizen videos. Political information is being propagated and through gatekeeping, information preference is being used more often (1024). Not only can readers choose what they access online, they can also specifically read up on any particular news category they prefer. This explains the reason why lifestyle blogs and personal blogs are on the rise; readers want to read what they want to hear. Preference is the key word here.

News outlets have catered to this growing preference, and have mixed hard news with entertainment updates as a way of meeting the need and mass readership of individuals. It is all about the ratings. In 2012, Williamson stated, “news concerning celebrities has disregarded a readership and has instead existed for the radical popularity

of news” (115). Readers everywhere can agree that readership is not ignored but that the radical popularity of celebrity news takes precedence over other news stories. The audience is still receiving the everyday news they want, but now major websites like Fox and CNN carry entertainment headlines alongside major headlines.

E! Network, PEOPLE and The Huffington Post as Direct Sources

There are many examples in which celebrity news updates on presidential endorsements premiered on entertainment sources such as E! Network (eonline.com or E! Channel) or *People* magazine (People.com). When news broke about a certain celebrity endorsing either Romney or Obama in 2012, the same updates also made headlines at six major news websites: Fox, CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC and MSNBC.

For example, on October 9, 2012 actress Stacey Dash took to Twitter to let fans know she was supporting Mitt Romney. Dash endured days of backlash and attacks made on the black actress for not supporting the black candidate, Obama. E! Online broke the story on their website early that morning (Loinaz). The next day on October 10, Fox News picked up the story to inform readers of Dash’s discontent and sadness over the attacks on her public endorsement.

On October 11, 2012 Lindsay Lohan announced she was supporting Mitt Romney for president and the story was immediately picked up by E!’s website (Boone). The next day, on October 12, Fox News posted the same headline announcing Lohan’s endorsement (McKay).

On Wednesday October 24, Katy Perry performed at a concert where she wore a dress printed like a voting ballot. The voting ballot had Obama’s name checked off when she came out on stage and she spoke of her support for the incumbent. The next day on

October 25, E! Online broadcasted this news (Macatee), while later in the day CNN also posted an article online about the singer's very public endorsement (CNN.com).

These are just a few prime examples in which celebrity journalism aids in the promotion of presidential endorsements. Celebrity journalism companies are setting the agenda for what should be considered headlining stories for major news networks. If a correlation exists between entertainment and hard news, it is indeed being aided by ongoing celebrity endorsements.

Summary

This review strongly suggests that whatever readers are told by their preferred media outlets is important. In turn, readers will ultimately believe it is important and will feel as though it should be discussed. In America, readers and viewers are given many avenues to receive news, the way they perceive news impacts how we will consider happenings around us. Based on how we perceive news given to us about particular candidates, voters' support can easily become influenced by announcements of celebrity endorsements. There are many ways in which individuals can receive their news, whether on television or online; evolving technology is making it easier for journalists to push their agenda. This study will help to confirm this idea by considering readership among celebrity journalism, recent presidential endorsements and political parties becoming a brand.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to test the agenda setting theory by using the comparison of celebrity-related news articles to news articles circulated by major news outlets such as ABC, Fox, CNN, MSNBC, NBC and CBS. This study describes a parallel between entertainment websites and news websites as pertaining to celebrity presidential endorsements. Using qualitative content analysis, categories and themes were determined to measure the correlation between the entertainment media and hard news outlets during the 2012 election. The formal research questions that will guide this qualitative analysis are:

RQ1: Does correlation exist between specific celebrities' endorsement articles being picked up before, the same day or after the entertainment sources?

RQ2: Does celebrity journalism by way of presidential endorsements influence hard news coverage?

This chapter explains the process of the study, the data collection, analysis, and validation for all of the given methodology.

Sample Selection

This purposive study considered three entertainment media websites: E!, *People* and *The Huffington Post*. All three are popular networks and companies that are known for time-sensitive, reliable news coverage on entertainment and celebrity culture.

E! is a network of NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment which is a division of NBCUniversal (Comcast). NBC is one of the world's leading media and entertainment companies in the development, production, and marketing of entertainment, news and information to a global audience. (NBCUniversal) E! Network is comprised of their

website, Eonline.com and television channel, E! HD. The cable channel, E! HD is now broadcast in the United States, Canada, Europe, and parts of Asia. According to a May 2012 article, E! described their success of their television network:

Also underscoring E!'s top standing in the pop culture landscape, the network continues to dominate in the social arena with 20 million likes/followers on Facebook and Twitter. E! is also the only entertainment network that ranks among the top 10 most popular brands on Twitter and is the three-screen leader ranking #1 in terms of combined network reach of on-air, online and mobile platforms according to a recent Nielsen study (Edelsburg).

E!'s popular television programming is directly connected to their website Eonline.com, which averages 10 million monthly visitors. (Rose 2012) E! Online promotes celebrity news updates, photos and videos, red carpet events, programming schedules, etc. The website recently received a face-lift and was described by executives:

Coming off its biggest year ever in 2012 and averaging 10 million monthly uniques, the site will be expanded, updated and reignited with a tablet friendly redesign that builds on its best-in-class entertainment coverage and offers improvements in functionality and user interaction, as well as enhancements to its live streaming capabilities, high-res photo galleries and unique social integrations (Edelsburg).

The second website used is People.com. In early 1974, Henry R. Luce, Time Inc co-founder, took a large step forward by bringing out *People*, a new magazine based on the old journalistic precept that "names make news." According to managing editor Richard Stolley: "We're getting back to the people who are causing the news and who are

caught up in it, or deserve to be in it. Our focus is on people, not issues." The weekly 72-page premiere of *People* occurred later in 1974. Time Inc. has experienced great success in the digital realm:

The Time Inc. Network of sites [such as PEOPLE], reaches over 40M unique users each month who visit 1.2B pages, putting it among the top 20 largest media companies online . . . the company has established itself as a leader in the social media space, sharing branded content including breaking news, celebrity interviews and links to exclusive video footage with over 22 million followers on Twitter and over 6 million on Facebook. (Time Warner)

People Magazine is still owned by Time Inc. today and, while the magazine covers people and not issues, the website differs in that it covers exclusively celebrity news. In 2006, *Teen People*, *People's* magazine just for teens, ended their run after reaching their financial peak in 2001. "Despite the importance of celebrity news in the entertainment industry, the shutting of *Teen People* could signal a contraction of an overstuffed category. Celebrity news is available more immediately than a monthly magazine can offer, and young people increasingly are getting their information, including celebrity news, online." (Seelye) Later in 2006, *People* magazine recorded a weekly circulation of 3.7 million readers. (Seelye)

According to Time Inc., in 2012 PEOPLE's website received 13 million unique visitors a month. The website provides an unrivaled 360-degree look at stars' lives by means of several channels: "the A-Z celebrity bio database, News, Photos, Moms & Babies, Pets, TV Watch, Video and StyleWatch." (Time Inc., 2012)

Finally, *The Huffington Post's* website was the third sample used in the researcher's study. *The Huffington Post* was founded by Ariana Huffington in 2005, and in February 2011 was bought by AOL for \$315 million. (Silver) "The company offers links to various categories of topics, including politics, social news, media, business, entertainment, living, style, green, books, and impact, as well as blogs. It also provides solutions for marketers." (Bloomberg BusinessWeek 2013) *The Huffington Post* already has international editions in Britain, Canada, France, Italy and Spain. A Japanese version is due to launch in May, while a German edition was just announced in April 2013. (Yahoo! News)

The Huffington Post attracts readers mainly for their political pieces, and their entertainment tab has become more popular as they now contain a section entitled "Political Hollywood." Here readers find any news updates on celebrities within the realm of political endorsements, issues or opinions on ongoing stories in the media (The Huffington Post). According to a 2011 article by the New York Times:

Ms. Huffington says that politics represents about 15 percent of *The Huffington Post's* traffic; 15 percent of 15.6 million daily page views is 2.3 million. Those 2.3 million page views are split between about 100 articles per day. But the distribution is highly unequal: unpaid blog posts receive much less traffic than those that *The Huffington Post* is paying its staff to write or curate (Silver).

The Huffington Post takes pride in their work: Huffington said her site has "strict ground rules" for gathering and relating back to the corresponding news website. "That's why we get tons of requests every day from newspapers and other sites, asking us to link to their work" (Bloomberg). This publication takes pride in producing hundreds of stories

everyday, whether news or blogs, while also staying true to their roots as a political watchdog. In 2012, *The Huffington Post* became the first commercially run, United States digital media enterprise to win a Pulitzer Prize. (Calderone)

The justification in choosing this company lies in the tremendous readership of this publication. Aside from being an influential journal and website, *The Huffington Post* has been compared to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (Bercovici). Their commitment to “putting flesh and blood on data and statistics” while reporting all sides of the news has continued to carry the company. (Calderone) Huffington’s commitment to being a political blog has drawn attention from all sides of the spectrum, whether entertainment, lifestyle, business or comedy.

These three popular entertainment outlets, E!, *People* and *The Huffington Post* were compared to six major networks, which are Fox, ABC, NBC, CNN, MSNBC and CBS. The timing of the endorsement announcements made on the entertainment websites were linked to the timing of the same articles announced on the news websites. This allowed the researcher to test the agenda-setting theory firsthand.

More specifically, a chosen methodology, of a qualitative design, provided a comparison of entertainment websites such as E!, *People*, and *The Huffington Post*. These sites will be compared to six major news’ websites such as Fox, ABC, NBC, CNN, MSNBC and CBS. This will require a qualitative content analysis and purposive sampling within the study to prove the effects of celebrity journalism through the promotion of endorsements.

All networks; three cable and three broadcast, also contain a website following. Fox is the most influential cable network with 11 consecutive years of the most viewers;

this past election year (2012) saw an average of 2.071 million viewers. Overall in 2012, Fox's median prime-time viewership was flat at 1.9 million, although it continued to be the biggest draw of all the news channels. CNN and MSNBC come in a close second and third place. (Patten) CNN continued to struggle in prime time. "Median viewership for the original 24-hour news channel was down 4% from 2011 levels to 626,000, erasing gains from previous years" (Holcomb and Mitchell).

Fox Group is a giant media service whose assets include FOX News Channel (FNC), a 24-hour wide-ranging news service; FOX Business Network (FBN), a financial news channel delivering real-time information; and Fox News Radio, serving over 1,000 affiliates with live news and talk programming. "FOXnews.com is a website dedicated to providing readers with breaking news as well as political and entertainment news. FOXnews.com also offers live coverage of major news events as well as lifestyle tips and magazine style guides." (FoxNews.com)

CNN.com is among the world's leaders in online news and information delivery. With a dedicated staff in CNN's world headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, and in bureaus worldwide, CNN.com relies heavily on CNN's global team of almost 4,000 news professionals. CNN.com features the latest multimedia technologies, from live video streaming to audio packages to searchable archives of news features and background information. (CNN.com)

NBC Network owns NBCNews.com, which will be sampled in this study. NBC is the only broadcast news division with a conglomerated cable channel, MSNBC, also providing 24-hour coverage of news events around the globe. The continuously growing

online presence of NBC News and NBC News Digital encompasses websites such as NBCPolitics.com, TODAY.com and NBCNews.com, to name a few. (NBCUniversal) MSNBC is a branch of NBC. MSNBC has been named the leading cable landmark for analysis of daily headlines, astute political review and knowledgeable perspectives (NBC.com).

ABC News currently holds flagship shows such as *World News with Diane Sawyer*, *Good Morning America*, *20/20* and political pieces such as *This Week with George Stephanopolis*. With a typical television and radio viewership of 180 million people in a given month, ABC News exceeds all competition. “A premier news and information alliance between ABC News and Yahoo! News blends the Network’s global news-gathering operation and unrivaled lineup of trusted anchors and reporters with the digital media company’s vast distribution and cutting-edge technology to reach up to 100 million people in the U.S. each month on PCs, mobile devices and tablets.” (ABC Television Group)

Finally, CBS News also operates many avenues for news circulation across television (CBS Television Network), radio (CBS Radio News), hand-held devices (CBS Mobile) and the Internet (CBSNews.com). CBS News includes “bureaus across the globe and influential, critically acclaimed programs providing original reporting, interviews, investigations, analysis and breaking news 24 hours a day, seven days a week. CBS News is the news and information division of CBS Corporation, dedicated to providing the best in journalism.” (CBS News)

In April 2013, CNN, Fox, MSNBC and ABC made eBIZ MBA's list of "Top 15 Most Popular News Websites." CNN was ranked #2 under Yahoo News, with an estimated 74 million monthly visitors.

The sampling frame consists of any articles posted to E!, *People* or *The Huffington Post's* website concerning endorsements for the 2012 presidential election in the United States. More specifically, the researcher considered articles written about celebrity endorsements for candidates, whether this was a public announcement, or an attack of the announcement by others. The time and date of the articles on the entertainment websites were considered in order to compare it to the time and date of the articles posted on the six major news websites. The researcher looked for a correlation between entertainment articles on endorsements premiering first, to prove the agenda being set for hard news.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Sampling Period

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to search for specific content and data to assist in strengthening the agenda-setting theory. Purposive sampling has the ability to collect relevant information while potentially setting an agenda. "A purposive sample is chosen with the knowledge that it is not representative of the general population rather it attempts to represent a portion of the population." (Arboleda 62)

There is a disadvantage to purposive sampling, which would be to label the researcher as biased, or allow the readers to believe the researcher is setting his own agenda throughout the study. This bias could be set by the types of articles collected by the researcher based on the popularity of celebrities or candidates. The study aims to

prove the agenda-setting theory throughout journalism today. By strengthening this theory, the study will also show that a visible correlation exists between online entertainment networks and hard news companies.

Collection Period

Articles from the entertainment samples were considered strictly from the year 2012, until Election Day on November 6th. This election year began with the announcement of Democratic candidate, Barack Obama and Republican candidate, Mitt Romney campaigning for office. The researcher sampled articles on endorsement announcements written throughout the year 2012 as presidential debates were taking place and Election Day on November 6th was approaching. More and more celebrities started to announce their endorsements whether via Twitter, interviews, or their own personal blogs.

Some celebrities may have announced their endorsement earlier than 2012. This is due in part to Barack Obama standing as an incumbent during this election. Many celebrities who had voted for him in the 2008 election left their vote unchanged. This study only considered endorsements announced in the 2012-year, despite announcements made earlier in 2011.

Articles from the six major networks, ABC, NBC, CNN, Fox, MSNBC and CBS were also considered from the 2012 election year. The researcher attempted to find a correlation between the timing of when the articles were posted on the websites, specifically to show readers that the entertainment websites post the articles first, and later the news websites post them in correspondence. These findings aided in testing the agenda-setting theory within new occurrences in journalism.

Advantages to Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis allowed the researcher to gain insight from data. “For some authors, qualitative content analysis always entails counting words or categories (or analyzing them statistically if there is sufficient sample size) to detect patterns in the data, then analyzing those patterns to understand what they mean” (Forman and Damschroder 40). In most cases categories are generated from a qualitative analysis as a result of reading.

A qualitative analysis also allowed the researcher to properly study the correlation between journalism media. Other avenues of acquiring data would not have allowed the researcher to study the content that is needed to complete the study. Another advantage is that E!, *People*, *The Huffington Post* and all six news websites are known for archiving their news updates. Any articles can be searched for and found on the given website. In other words, studying articles from websites allowed the researcher to trace articles from a year ago, from a historical perspective.

Finally, a qualitative content analysis gave the researcher the correct data needed to complete the study. A time limitation existed due to the fact that news articles tend to be archived on websites. A content analysis directly after the last election gave the researcher the resources needed and directly focused attention on media content.

Limitations to Qualitative Content Analysis

A primary limitation to this study was in the area of the chosen time period. Celebrity endorsements have become increasingly available in the last ten years. Since the researcher’s study only involved the 2012 election, this limited previous examples where endorsements were carried from entertainment journalism to hard news outlets.

Another concern is the interest of the study among today's voters. Significant controversy has surfaced from the idea that celebrity endorsements do not matter in the large scheme of elections. The question remains on whether or not voters will consider the effects endorsements can have on campaigns. Furthermore, readers should consider if they are worried about entertainment culture potentially predicting major news. A 2012 article by Fox News described endorsements as so:

America loves its celebrities. Think *People* magazine and "Access Hollywood." Readers know what they eat, where they shop and who they date. They buy products celebrities endorse. *People* paid \$11 million for the photos of twins born to Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. It's an obsession with tinseltown's elite that is easily derided. But the campaigns know megawatt stars can deliver crowds, if not money. Proximity to stardom can reap big benefits for a politician. (La Jeunesse)

Whether or not a reader appreciates or disagrees with celebrity endorsements may be a limitation to some, but the hypothesized questions aided in potentially proving the given theory. The researcher was subject to bias already existed in the news as Barack Obama stood as an incumbent. The content and data set from a specific time period also limited the researcher as only the 2012 election's endorsements were studied.

Validity and Reliability

Although the outcomes are determined through the analysis of the researcher, there are steps in place to acknowledge the validity and reliability of the overall study. First, the researcher provided all citation and documentation for the specific articles chosen for the study. This process of strict referencing brings validity and security to the readers and also specifies why certain articles were chosen over others.

Secondly, justification was given on why the researcher decided to study specific articles from E!, *People* and *The Huffington Post*. There are many ways in which to consider a proposed correlation between stories written. The study of celebrity journalism, specifically endorsements, gave insight on patterns existing within entertainment stories.

Summary

The remaining chapters are comprised of the results, and discussion, ending with a conclusion section. The following chapter, containing the results, provides a comprehensive examination of the findings by means of qualitative content enquiry, the discussion will consider correlation among journalism mediums, themes and consider upcoming questions for further study. In the discussion section, the researcher cultivates new theories, raises innovative questions and supports existing illustrations of agenda setting within journalism.

Chapter 4: Results

A Review of the Study

The content of this qualitative content analysis includes eight websites; *People*, *E!*, *The Huffington Post*, ABC News, NBC News, CNN, Fox News and CBS News. This particular study is limited to the 2012 presidential election year, specifically from January 2012 to Election Day, November 6, 2012. The first part of the analysis looked at the correlation from entertainment websites to hard news websites. This is important due to the researcher's theory that says entertainment websites are dictating the news America is receiving. Over the last few elections, celebrity endorsements have continually grown within news mediums, potentially allowing readers to make decisions based on who their admired celebrity is voting for. The broadcast of celebrity endorsements has also allowed voters to see their reasoning behind the vote, while celebrities are pushing Americans to go out and vote on Election Day. No matter how much an American intentionally follows celebrity endorsements, they are bombarded with these announcements and sometimes, verbal outrages given by the celebrities themselves.

The second part of the results will group announcements that were broadcasted before the entertainment source. These announcements were picked up by hard news outlets before they were published by entertainment websites; *People*, *E!* and *The Huffington Post*.

The third section of the results will group the rest of the announcements studied, which were published on hard news sites the same day as the entertainment source. Again, the popularity of the celebrity may have been a factor in this but nonetheless every article published was considered in a strict time-sensitive manner.

In total, 60 news articles were compared to the 12 entertainment articles chosen for this study. The specific celebrities studied were selected on the basis of their given Q Score:

Q Scores identify the most enthusiastic consumers of a personality, character or licensed property, program, or brand. Derived from our data collection model of the *Favorites Concept*, the Q Scores measure of likeability is an important predictor of greater consumer involvement. Understanding how these consumers are impacted, enables clients to make the most informed decisions regarding their marketing, advertising, and media efforts. (QScores.com)

The celebrities chosen for this study have all been given a Q Score meaning the public has given them industry recognition. Q Score is to celebrities, what Nielson is to television. When it comes to Q Scores, “the higher the incidence of *favorites*, the stronger is the fan base, or consumer franchise. When exposed to their *favorites*, the consumer has a greater likelihood to be more attentive, be more involved, have higher recall, and have a more positive image.” (QScores.com)

The articles used for comparison featured endorsement stories on Katy Perry (musician), Sarah Jessica Parker (actress), Clint Eastwood (actor), Donald Trump (entrepreneur), Lindsay Lohan (actress), Kid Rock (musician), Beyonce (musician), Madonna (musician), George Clooney (actor), Jay-Z (musician), Rush Limbaugh (radio host), and Ted Nugent (musician). These articles are listed in Appendix #1 and again, were selected based each celebrity’s particular endorsement announcement.

All twelve celebrities have received a Q Score based on their popularity and likeability. A Q score is a measurement of consumer familiarity with a particular brand

by means of a survey. This is merged with the overall consumer reaction to the brand. For a brand to receive a high Q score, people must both like a brand and be previously familiar with it. The specific Q Scores given to the twelve celebrities chosen for this study are considered propriety information on the QScores.com

For each entertainment source, *People*, E! and *The Huffington Post*, two Democratic and two Republican endorsements were chosen in order to balance the two sides and ultimately to keep the study unbiased. All twelve articles used were written about that particular celebrity's endorsement whether it was announcing their voting plans or fundraisers being held for a particular candidate, and so on. When searching on news websites, if the specific details of the celebrity's endorsement correlating to the entertainment article were not found, the article closest to the timing of the entertainment article was chosen for comparison. For example, if a news article confirming Eva Longoria's plans to co-chair Obama's election does not exist, a news article on Longoria's election plans written closest to the timing of the entertainment article was chosen. The timing of the news article was closely examined to the timing of the entertainment article. Whichever article was written closest to entertainment article, whether that is before or after, was chosen for the comparison.

Changes in the Study

As the researcher began analyzing the news sources, ABC, CNN, NBC, CBS, MSNBC and Fox, there were many similarities between MSNBC and NBC. This is due in part to NBC being in direct ownership of MSNBC. NBC News' website strictly reports the news while MSNBC focuses more on their network's shows and issues. Whatever news was found on MSNBC was directly correlated to headlines published on NBC's

website. Therefore, MSNBC was dropped from the study completely and the researcher examined articles from five news websites instead of six.

All of the 60 articles were categorized into three specific categories; news articles published after the entertainment source, news articles published before the entertainment source and finally news articles published the same day as the entertainment source. It is important to point out that not all articles about a certain celebrity were grouped in the same category. For example, some news articles about Donald Trump's endorsement were published before the entertainment source, after the entertainment and also the same day of the entertainment source.

Articles Published After the Entertainment Source

To begin with articles published after the entertainment source, the researcher found 34 articles fell into this category; as shown in Appendix #2. Specifically, 34 out of the 60 news articles from ABC, NBC, CNN, Fox and CBS were published after the entertainment sources: People, E! and The Huffington Post. The celebrities who fell in this category were Katy Perry, Clint Eastwood, Donald Trump, Lindsay Lohan, Kid Rock, Beyonce, Madonna, George Clooney, Jay-Z, Rush Limbaugh and Ted Nugent. The only celebrity who did not fall into this category was Sarah Jessica Parker.

Articles Published Before the Entertainment Source

The next group of news articles were published before the entertainment source. There were 16 out of 60 articles on celebrity presidential endorsements published on the news websites before the entertainment sources. Out of the twelve celebrities, the specific stories that fell under this category were Katy Perry, Sarah Jessica Parker, Donald Trump, George Clooney, Jay-Z and Ted Nugent.

Articles Posted the Same Day As the Entertainment Source

The final group of news articles were published on the same day as the entertainment source. There were 10 articles that fell into this category and included celebrities such as Katy Perry, Sarah Jessica Parker, Clint Eastwood, Donald Trump, Lindsay Lohan, Madonna and Ted Nugent. The articles were considered as a “day of” source on the basis of the date rather than the timing of the news articles.

Summary

In summary, the results show most of the news articles were published after the entertainment source, followed by articles written before the entertainment source, and finally the least of the articles were written on the same day as the entertainment source. These predetermined results gave the researcher enough answers to draw a correlation between entertainment news and mainstream news as hypothesized. If a correlation does indeed exist then there are many reasons as to why this correlation is so strong and how this can affect future study.

The following chapter will acknowledge correlations, answer the research questions and further discuss the results. By testing the agenda-setting analysis theory the researcher was able to draw conclusions and track trends based on the timing of the news articles studied (see Appendix 2).

Chapter 5: Discussion

*“As long as you’re famous, you’ve become an enormous commodity in this country, and news is a business. Newspaper entities need to sell paper, websites want traffic, television networks want ratings, and increasingly the way to get that is to have an entertainment component.”- Dan Abrams (*Sellebrity* 2012).*

Every single television news network today contains an entertainment segment and the majority of newspapers also claim similar content. The ongoing need to escape biased journalism no longer exists as Americans are continually bombarded with agenda-setting in its most concrete and monumental means. Most Americans don’t notice a change of news reporting and consider entertainment reporting the new norm. Journalism produced by networks today is tailored to keeping ratings up while also reporting what is considered “important”.

When speaking on entertainment media, researchers are quick to argue, “correlation does not imply causation”- meaning in hindsight that entertainment news correlating to mainstream news does not cause entertainment to be featured in our daily news. For example, Kelly Toughill in 2010 explained that correlation and causation “are tricky, because causation is hard to prove even when it does exist...When presented with a correlation story, look for a valid comparison to prove the theory, and think about what else might have caused the trend. It is unlikely, for example, that an increase in the number of police officers will quickly affect crime rates” (33).

The agenda-setting theory suggests media places higher importance on certain news stories in order to convince the viewers these stories deserve more attention than others. Whether or not this importance is proposed by the majority or by the network

itself is up to the viewer to decide. The following discussion section will answer research questions, expose patterns, state conclusions and justify limitations within the study.

Research Questions Answered

RQ1: Does correlation exist between specific celebrities' endorsement articles being picked up before, the same day or after entertainment sources?

Let us focus on the endorsement articles posted on news websites after the entertainment source. In this study, eleven out of the twelve chosen celebrities featured in the entertainment articles were followed by coverage within news outlets. Many of the celebrities mentioned in the articles picked up by news sources are celebrities that were already in the headlines for other decisions they had made and rumors prior to their endorsement announcement.

For example, According to HuffPost Celebrity, Katy Perry was featured in the news for her surprising new relationship with singer John Mayer (Lee). Lindsay Lohan was thrown into media headlines when a dramatic fight occurred between her and her mother at their Long Island home, cops were called to the scene, as reported by TMZ Staff. Finally, Beyonce was featured on HuffPost Celebrity as she was believed to be pregnant, this was kept in the headlines for a few weeks until the rumor was proven false (Marcus). These examples show how celebrities' non-political and non-entertainment generated stories tend to be picked up by hard news outlets due to their existing celebrity status.

It is not surprising that news networks picked up these specific eleven celebrities so quickly. Many of them are constantly circulating in tabloids and news websites on a weekly basis. This may have been due in part to the prominence of the celebrity or a

celebrity switching from right wing to left wing and vice versa. I believe their popularity played a part in how quickly news networks picked up their endorsement.

Another pattern I did notice was that it was a lot easier to find endorsement articles for former President Obama than it was for Mitt Romney. This may have been due in part to the entertainment industry growing in their liberal stance rather than turning to pro-conservative arguments. As previously mentioned, many celebrities voted for President Obama in the 2008 election and left their vote unchanged for the 2012 election.

As the researcher, I do believe there was an imbalance in news broadcast between both parties. Many of the articles written on Obama's celebrity endorsers were broadcasted more frequently and in greater depth. The news media portrayed Romney's supporters as egotistical and angry. In *Collusion* (2013), Bozell and Graham describe how the media stole the 2012 election: "The most usable facts about Obama were the positive facts. The most usable quotes about Obama were the positive quotes. The most compelling narratives about Obama were the endearingly personal narratives. The reverse held true for his opponent" (18).

RQ2: Does celebrity journalism by way of presidential endorsements influence hard news coverage?

Reviewing the results of this study allowed me to see how clearly the agenda-setting theory is being played out in American news today. Many of the networks were quick to pick up celebrity endorsements in order to place importance on certain candidates. CNN took the lead with this by picking up 9 endorsement stories out of the 12 after the entertainment source. The network's perceived affiliation to the Democratic or Republican party also plays a big role in this. Fox News was eager to post articles on

Romney's endorsers while finding specific articles on Obama's endorsers on CNN's website was a breeze.

As time went on I realized entertainment and mainstream news are predominantly correlated to each other. Both mediums seek to grab readers' attention quickly, and to keep it for as long as they can, until a new shocking story comes out. News outlets and entertainment sources cannot be determined as the direct cause of one another. One source cannot be the direct causation of another; meaning entertainment news articles picked up by news networks does not encompass the connection within agenda-setting. Celebrity endorsements are just another way in which news is encompassing entertainment in their daily broadcasts.

"The concept of hard news has really changed, a lot of what used to be considered tabloid is now mainstream." - Peter Howe (*\$ellebrity* 2012). With the rise of celebrity culture, it is easy to see why news can take on the role of announcing celebrity happenings on a weekly basis. News networks are quick to pick up stories on celebrities so their ratings can be boosted. Readers want to hear what their favorite celebrity is doing and why; it's as simple as that.

News networks have been covering celebrity culture since the days of Mary Pickford; making the resonance of celebrity news bound to stay put. Bozell and Graham spoke of a celebrity's role in the 2012 election:

No pollster ever asks the public if they believe Beyonce 'understands the problems of people like you.' In a very real way, it doesn't matter. She's a performer, not a political leader. But in American culture, Hollywood is the closet

we'll come to royalty, and where royalty parks its endorsement somehow means something, just as so many Hollywood stars sheers ignorance means nothing (37). News outlets use their own journalists, primary affiliations, entertainment news, target audience and the overall need for good ratings in order to build their agenda. A celebrity's presidential endorsement is just another avenue in which news networks can do this to their advantage while also meeting the needs of their readers.

Limitations

There were plenty of limitations to be accounted for in this study. As the researcher I was prompted to be very specific from the early developmental stages of the study. When it comes to researching and writing on American politics it is easy to be fixated on your own political party, I recognized this capability and decided that in order to have quality results I needed to equally study endorsements of both major party candidates.

The first limitation was the study's specific timeline. This timeline covered January 1, 2012 to November 6, 2012. It was a challenge to narrow down celebrity endorsement announcements to just those ten months and six days. Broadening my timeline into late 2011 would have allowed more opportunity to cover other celebrity endorsements, which in turn could have assisted the strength of my argument.

As seen in Appendix 2, many of the endorsement announcements were not necessarily announced right before Election Day. Early in 2012, most celebrities spoke more quickly of their endorsement due to Barack Obama standing as an incumbent in the election. Celebrities who did not express their opinions during the 2008 election were now letting their voice be heard for this election. According to PolicyMic this was due

largely to social media. “Twitter has not only made it easier for politicians, celebrities and journalists to reach out to vast numbers of people, it has also made it a lot easier to calculate or guess how influential a celebrity endorsement could be judging by the number of followers said celebrity has” (Wong).

On the other hand, many celebrities who supported Barack Obama in 2008 left their vote unchanged. With the allegations of President Obama’s stance on major issues such as gay marriage and gun control, readers heard more celebrity opinions in this election than ever before. Actors such as *Law & Order’s* Ice-T voiced his opinion on gun control. He was one of the few celebrities to keep a pro-gun stance during the election. He told E!, “It’s legal [to own guns] in the United States. It’s part of our Constitution” (Grossberg).

Further limitations also included a lack of time recording of the publications on the compared websites. The time of the published article was recorded on some articles while it was left out on others. This limitation caused the researcher to create distinct categories to place the articles in. The categories were distinguished as: “articles posted before the entertainment site, articles posted on the day of the entertainment site and articles posted after the entertainment site.” This allowed the researcher to be specific in placing articles in a certain category. These grouping also denied any bias in choosing articles that could have been written before or after the entertainment source.

A final limitation included the entertainment sources that were chosen for the study. While E!, *People* and *The Huffington Post* are primarily known for their entertainment component, other websites are in competition with these companies due to the popularity of entertainment culture. TMZ is another entertainment source that is

highly popular, alongside *Pop Sugar* and *US Weekly*. The three sources chosen for this study were chosen based on popularity, following and the size of the company. Choosing other websites to compare would have broadened the study but on the other hand would have limited the number of endorsement articles chosen. Not every entertainment source encompasses stories and updates on political Hollywood the way *E!*, *People* and *The Huffington Post* does.

Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for future research include previous elections; a deeper look at the effects of celebrity endorsements and the relationships that exist between candidates and celebrities.

As previously mentioned in Halenon-Knight's "Whom Endorses Whom?..." the researcher found endorsements can help out both parties: "Celebrity endorsement could become a more strategic alliance built around the linking and integration of the attributes of the two allying brands aiming to leverage the brand associations of the brands involved and enhance both brands' image and reputation" (457). Future research would allow conclusions to be drawn on how celebrities take advantage of their statuses during election periods in order to better their reputations.

Additionally deeper research would allow a researcher to indicate the larger role celebrity endorsements are playing and could potentially play in future elections. A specific study could include the 2016 election since no incumbents will be running for presidential term. This will give readers insight on how endorsements and voter opinions are formed when new candidates come into play. There is no doubt that future elections will contain celebrity speeches, endorsements and fundraisers but no researcher can

predict how much emphasis endorsements can have. Celebrity endorsements can play certain roles in elections depending on the celebrity, the current status of the celebrity and the celebrity's fundraising and promotion for the candidate.

Another avenue to continue research would be to compare and contrast the celebrity endorsements of 2008 election to the 2012 election. Every election year celebrities decide what role they will play in getting Americans to vote. For example, as previously mentioned in the 2008 election, television host Oprah Winfrey spent a lot of her time promoting new candidate Barack Obama. Winfrey's push for Obama led researchers to believe she could alter the election results. When it came time for the 2012 election Winfrey decided she would remain silent on who she was voting for. Further research would allow the researcher to compare the larger role Hispanic and African American celebrities played in the 2012 election rather than the 2008 election.

Another promising avenue includes a look at the specific timing of a celebrity's endorsement announcement and how this directly affects a candidate's stance in the polls. The researcher could also consider the ties that existed between a specific celebrity and a candidate in the 2012 election. Research questions could include: does a celebrity's promotion for a candidate really matter in the long run? When a celebrity announces their endorsement are they doing it to boost their image or to boost the image of the candidate? When a troubled celebrity announces their endorsement does this hurt the public image of the candidate?

A concluding suggestion involves considering Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart and Bill Maher and their influence on young voters. All three of these political commentators have a following that mainly consists of younger Americans. The researcher could

consider how much of an influence these shows have on future elections and if taking their commentating seriously can hurt or help during elections.

Conclusion

My study found that although many correlations exist between entertainment and news media, one cannot say they are causing an influx in entertainment updates. Simply put, the correlation between entertainment news and mainstream news cannot be deemed as the cause of one another. Correlations found in this study include the celebrity endorsements themselves and the timing of entertainment stories consecutively broadcast onto news websites. Although these correlations provide a strong reasoning for news to be easily influenced, future endorsements and celebrities will provide stronger evidence for how news is being altered to lift ratings.

New research will allow voters to understand reasons why celebrity culture plays a big role in our daily news feed. While the 2012 presidential election proved to carry celebrity endorsements into our news feed more than previous elections, the popularity of the celebrity had much to do with this. Entertainment news has been and will continue to be a staple in our nation's news feed. Celebrity endorsements are here to stay whether they exist in national conventions, commercials, tweets, interviews or blog posts. Ultimately, endorsements of all kinds will continue to play a part in our presidential elections, whether Americans like it or not.

Hypothetically, if there comes a time where Americans ignore celebrities and their opinions, endorsements will cease to exist in elections. Ultimately, it is up to the voter to decide how much leeway an endorsement will have in their voting. Agenda-setting exists in journalism the same way candidate support exists in a celebrity's

endorsement. As long as entertainment continues to coexist with mainstream news, agenda-setting will continue to attract readers on a daily basis.

“Our politics, our religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice.”- Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death

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Appendix 1: News Articles Used for Study

PEOPLE

Katy Perry- **OBAMA** “Michelle Obama Is Guest of Honor at Jada Pinkett Smith, Salma Hayek Lunch” 10/26/12 2:00PM EDT

<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20642590,00.html>

Sarah Jessica Parker- **OBAMA** “Sarah Jessica Parker Hosts a Fundraiser for President Obama” 6/15/12 11:00AM EDT

<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20604406,00.html>

Clint Eastwood- **ROMNEY** “Clint Eastwood Takes Aim at Obama, Whose Campaign Fires Right Back” 8/31/12 9:00AM EDT

<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20626031,00.html>

Donald Trump- **ROMNEY** “Second Presidential Debate: As Tweeted by Snooki, Eva Longoria and More” 10/17/12 12:25PM EDT

<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20639703,00.html>

HUFFINGTON POST

Lindsay Lohan- **ROMNEY** “Lindsay Lohan & Romney? Actress Says Mitt's Got Her Vote, For Now” 10/12/12 Posted: 10/12/2012 8:56AM Updated: 10/12/2012 3:22PM

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/12/lindsay-lohan-romney-vote-employment_n_1960935.html

Kid Rock- **ROMNEY** “Kid Rock & Paul Ryan? Rocker Isn't Worried About Upsetting Fans” 10/8/12 10:22PM ET

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/09/kid-rock-paul-ryan_n_1950612.html

Beyonce- **OBAMA** Jay-Z & Beyonce's Obama Fundraiser: Hip-Hop's Royal Couple Will Host President At 40/40 Club 9/11/12 2:13 PM

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/11/jay-z-beyonce-obama-fundraiser_n_1874623.html

Madonna- **OBAMA** “Madonna: Obama Is 'A Black Muslim In The White House,' Deserves Votes” 9/25/12 9:55AM

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/25/madonna-obama-black-muslim_n_1912400.html

E! ONLINE

George Clooney- **OBAMA** “*George Clooney's Barack Obama Fundraiser Drums Up Record-Breaking \$12 Million*” 5/4/12 5:44AM PDT

<http://www.eonline.com/news/313803/george-clooney-s-barack-obama-fundraiser-drums-up-record-breaking-12-million>

Jay-Z – **OBAMA** “*Jay-Z Attends Obama Rally in Ohio and Raps "99 Problems and Mitt Ain't One"*” 11/6/12 8:26 AM PST

<http://www.eonline.com/news/360593/jay-z-attends-obama-rally-in-ohio-and-raps-99-problems-and-mitt-ain-t-one>

Rush Limbaugh- **ROMNEY** “*Rush Limbaugh: Dark Knight Rises' Bane Is a Dig at Mitt Romney!*” 7/17/12 8:25PM PDT

<http://www.eonline.com/news/331030/rush-limbaugh-dark-knight-rises-bane-is-a-dig-at-mitt-romney>

Ted Nugent- **ROMNEY** “*Ted Nugent Goes Off on CBS Reporter—See Explosive Encounter Now!*” 5/4/12 10:08 AM PDT

<http://www.eonline.com/news/313865/ted-nugent-goes-off-on-cbs-reporter-see-explosive-encounter-now>

Appendix 2: Chart

Entertainment Sources	Article Subject	ABC News time/ web address	NBC News time/ web address	CNN News time/ web address	FOX News time/ web address	CBS News time/ web address
PEOPLE: Katy Perry 10/26/12 2:00PM	Perry attends luncheon in honor Obama	11/3/12 4:47PM http://abcnews.go	10/26/12 NT http://www.today.com	10/25/12 2:54PM http://politi	10/24/12 NT http://nation.foxnews.c	10/26/12 2:16PM http://www
PEOPLE: Sarah Jessica Parker 6/15/12 11:00AM	SJP hosts Obama fundraiser at NYC home	6/14/12 10:26PM http://abcnews.g	6/15/12 NT http://www.nbc.com/n	6/15/12 9:05AM http://whitef	6/14/12 NT http://www.foxnews.com	6/14/12 11:41AM http://www.c
PEOPLE: Clint Eastwood 8/31/12 9:00AM	Eastwood's speech at RNC	8/31/12 NT http://abcnews.go.com	8/31/12 11:46AM http://www.nbcn	8/31/12 4:48PM http://www.c	8/31/12 NT http://www.foxnews.com	8/31/12 2:13PM http://www.c
PEOPLE: Donald Trump 10/17/12 12:25PM	Trump tweets during 2nd presidential debat	10/24/12 NT http://abcnews.go.com	10/26/12 8:20AM http://www.nbcn	10/16/12 4:15PM http://politi	10/17/12 NT http://nation.foxnews.c	10/15/12 3:32PM http://www
HUFFPOST: Lindsay Lohan 10/12/12 8:56AM	Lohan announces support for Romney	10/12/13 NT http://abcnews.go.com	10/12/13 10:05AM http://www.nbc	10/12/13 10:13AM http://mar	10/12/13 NT http://www.foxnews.co	10/12/13 6:22PM http://www
HUFFPOST: Kid Rock 10/8/12 10:22PM	Kid Rock supports Romney/Ryan at Detroit r	10/8/13 11:01PM http://abcnews.g	11/2/12 10:06PM http://firstread.n	10/9/12 3:07PM http://politic	10/9/12 NT http://nation.foxnews.co	10/9/12 8:18AM http://www.c
HUFFPOST: Beyonce 9/11/12 2:13PM	Beyonce holds fundraiser at club for Obama	9/11/12 11:22PM http://abcnews.g	9/18/12 1:46PM http://abcnews.g	9/12/12 5:23PM http://politic	9/13/12 NT http://www.foxnews.com	9/13/12 4:49PM http://www.c
HUFF POST: Madonna 9/25/12 9:55AM	Madonna calls Obama black muslim, says he	9/25/12 3:52PM http://abcnews.go	9/25/12 3:12PM http://www.nbcne	9/26/12 10:08AM http://marq	9/25/12 NT http://www.foxnews.com	9/25/12 10:51AM http://www.c
EI: George Clooney 5/4/12 5:44AM	Clooney to host fundraiser for Obama	5/11/12 2:55AM http://abcnews.go	4/10/12 3:43PM http://www.nbcne	5/13/12 11:21AM http://white	4/10/12 NT http://nation.foxnews.co	4/11/12 4:23PM http://www.c
EI: Jay-Z 11/6/12 8:26 AM	Jayz raps during Ohio rally in support of Oba	11/5/12 5:46PM http://abcnews.go	11/5/12 5:13PM http://www.nbcne	11/6/12 10:34AM http://marq	11/5/12 NT http://nation.foxnews.co	11/6/12 5:00AM http://www.c
EI: Rush Limbaugh 7/17/12 8:25PM	Rush defends Romney amongst Batman proi	7/19/12 12:01PM http://abcnews.g	7/18/12 8:09AM http://www.nbcne	7/18/12 12:01PM http://marq	7/18/12 NT http://www.foxnews.com	7/18/12 6:06AM http://www.c
EI: Ted Nugent 5/4/12 10:08AM	Nugent comments on Obama's future re-ele	5/4/12 NT http://abcnews.go.com/	5/4/12 11:18AM http://www.nbcne	6/4/12 8:53AM http://political	5/4/12 NT http://nation.foxnews.com	5/4/12 5:29AM http://www.ct
NT= No time given for article publication posted before Entertainment source posted after Entertainment source						
Democratic Party						
Republican Party						