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# Celebrity political party endorsement and voter behaviour: a post-election empirical evidence

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## ABSTRACT

The study submits a piece of real-life empirical evidence on voter choice influenced by celebrity endorsement in an election other than the dominant evidence of measured intentions in the scant literature on celebrity political party endorsements and voter behaviour. It responds to calls for more research on the subject, which is motivated by country-specific political nuances and their associated voter behaviour variations that affect measures of celebrity political endorsements. Drawing on the source credibility model, the study examined the influence of celebrity endorsements on voters' choice of political party brands in Ghana. Attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise were conceptualised as a tri-component construct that influenced voters' choices of endorsed political parties at the polls. Voters' political salience was included in the model as a moderating variable, with voters' age and gender as control variables. Leveraging scales from extant literature, data was collected from 1463 voters right after participating in the 2020 Ghanaian general elections using purposive sampling and the intercept mode. The results indicate positive relationships between trustworthiness, attractiveness, and voters' political brand choice. While political salience moderated the relationship between trustworthiness and voters' choice, the control variables provided no support for their hypothesised relationships. Compelling implications and recommendations are discussed.

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Celebrity political endorsements; trustworthiness; attractiveness; voter political salience; voter political brand choice; Ghana

## Introduction

Celebrity endorsement is mostly associated with products, brands, organisations, and increasingly, political parties and candidates who count on celebrities' public recognition and popularity to advance their political course. The convergence between political brands and celebrities for this common goal has been a long-standing trend worldwide, especially in democratic and multi-party dispensations. To present themselves attractive to voters and political audiences, political parties adopt marketing communication strategies to enhance their political campaigns and get their political parties' messages across. In this general regard, celebrities with careers in music and entertainment, sports,

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movie, cinema, and television production among others, have campaigned for and against political parties, their messages, candidates, and on political issues (Jackson and Darrow 2005; Mishra and Mishra 2014). Accordingly, celebrity political endorsements (hereafter, CPE) refer to celebrities as endorsers for political purposes (Henneberg and Chou 2014; Jackson 2007). CPE make political parties and, by extension, their candidates more popular with voters as the endorsers have established popularity and some positive appeal among the populace (Kaur and Sohal 2022). A distinguishing characteristic of democracy is multi-party politics, through which political parties compete for the votes of citizens who wield the power to vote for the party and candidate with superior policy, and solutions to the myriad of human, social and economic problems (Makinda 1996; Schofield and Sened 2006). Generally, empirical evidence suggests that celebrity endorsements have effectively driven a favourable product and brand attitude (Erdogan 1999; McCormick 2016; Ohanian 1991). In the context of political marketing communications, celebrity endorsement and party electoral fortunes, particularly in the USA and UK, Payne et al. (2007), Jackson and Darrow (2005) and Ekant et al. (2010) provide evidence in favour of the phenomenon. The traditional narrative has described a party faithful to have entrenched and unwavering belief and support for their party's ideologies, policy statements and beliefs. Hence, such party loyalists remain very committed to their political parties. Thus, their decision to vote for a political party and its candidate in an election is always rooted. To that end, employing political brand communication strategies such as celebrity endorsements may not influence party loyalists.

On the contrary, some voters are nonaligned and not necessarily loyal to any political party. As such, they may hitch their voting decisions on issue salience, thus the political period's exigencies and problems such as the economy, corruption, and foreign policy, among others (Johns 2010). Anecdotally, it is assumed in many political contestations that such voters decide the political party and candidate that emerges as the winner. Consequently, several political marketing communications strategies of which CPE is prominent are deployed to attract these group of voters (Chou 2014). Across various multi-party electoral dispensations, actors, sportspersons and other famous and influential individuals and groups have been recruited with some voluntarily aligning themselves with identifiable political groupings and persons and making political statements with an underlying goal of influencing political behaviours of electorates who idolise these celebrities (Wood and Herbst 2007).

For instance, in the lead-up to the US presidential elections in 2008, celebrities like Diddy (vote or Die campaign), Oprah Winfrey and Ben Affleck; (Rock the Vote campaign) publicly supported and endorsed the candidature of President Barack Obama. It is believed that these endorsements resulted in the highest voter turnout and the election of Obama (Payne, Gregory, and Hanlon 2007). Similarly, in the lead-up to the 2020 US presidential elections, candidate Joe Biden and his running mate received Hollywood endorsements from popular figures like Cardi B, Taylor Swift, and Tom Hanks. Similarly, the incumbent, President Donald Trump, also received some endorsements from celebrities like musician Kid Rock, James Wood, and Scott Baio (CBS News, 2020). The 2019 contest between Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson of the Labour and the Conservative parties respectively witnessed some celebrity endorsements in the UK. In addition to these well-established multi-party democracies, which are comparable to a free-market system that encourages competition and consumer choice of a variety of brand

substitutes, young and developing democracies like Ghana adopt CPEs during political campaigns and in the lead-up to general elections. Many celebrities have lent their support to political party brands in almost every presidential election under the 4<sup>th</sup> Ghanaian republican constitution. In some of these instances, as in the case of other jurisdictions, some of these endorsers go a step further to present themselves as parliamentary candidates for the endorsed party (celebrity politicians) (Fernández Gómez, Pineda and Gordillo-Rodríguez 2021). The global widespread of the phenomenon has attracted research attention, particularly in examining the influence of these endorsements on voter behaviour. Accordingly, in a few instances, marketing researchers have attempted to investigate the influence of various CPEs on the likely outcome of some elections in different electoral contestations. The findings of these studies generally show that CPE has a positive effect on outcomes such as voter intentions to vote for an endorsed political party or candidate, the policies put forth by a party or candidate, voter attitude towards endorsed candidates, voter emotions, enhanced perceived credibility as well as political ideology (Ekant et al. 2010; Fernándezgómez, Pineda, and Gordillo-Rodríguez 2021; Gencoglu 2021; Mishra and Mishra 2014; Morin, Ivory, and Tubbs 2012; vonSikorski, Knoll, and Matthes 2018). Nevertheless, CPE studies are scarce (Fernándezgómez, Pineda, and Gordillo-Rodríguez 2021; Morin, Ivory, and Tubbs 2012), and the limited studies that have explored CPE and outcomes related to voters' electoral preferences examined intentions and not actual behaviour (e.g., Christine et al. 2019; Ekant et al. 2010; Kaur and Sohal 2022) with some of these studies (e.g., Frizzell 2011; Nownes 2012) producing inconsistent results. These opposing findings can be attributed to the significant peculiarities and country-specific characterisations of political nuances that make it almost impossible to generalise evidence in the literature on the influence of CPE on the average voter (Ekant et al. 2010; Johns 2010).

Political salience refers to a voter's attitude, interest, and emotional attachment to political issues. Different terms have been used to describe the phenomenon, for example, issue salience and political product involvement (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2020). When a voter is politically salient, it is assumed that they are abreast with happenings in the social and political landscape and consequently process political information faster (Jackson and Darrow 2005). Earlier studies that examined the impact of issue salience on voter behaviour conclude that not all issues are important to voters. As such, some issues do not influence their voting decisions. However, overall, personal political salience (hereafter, PPS) requires that voters who possess a high level of PPS exhibit a greater understanding between political issues and their daily lives (Ekant et al. 2010). In line with this reasoning, voters' political salience, which is their emotional attachment and commitment to following political issues and events, may influence their assessment and subsequent acceptance of a CPE in forming their voting behaviour.

From the ensuing discussions, four broad issues emerge – the CPE, political marketing communications, and voter behaviour literature is evolving, and calls are being made for further research into the phenomenon considering relevant factors such as context-specific peculiarities (Ekant et al. 2010). Second, extant studies on CPE and its outcomes focused on voter intentions as outcomes and not actual behaviour despite the critical limitations of measuring intentions as dependent variables (Hulland and Houston 2021). Third, as empirical evidence suggests, people are not just concerned about their well-being but also with the well-being of the

entire society (Lerner et al., 2019). Additionally, the proliferation of technological gadgets, social networking sites, internet penetration and the resultant innovation of media houses, enhances ubiquitous news consumption. As a direct result of this, a greater number of citizens are actively participating in political discourses, which is likely to influence an organic rise in PPS. Accordingly, a person's own political salience may impact the association between CPE and voter behaviour out of personal motivations, social preference and the greater good of all. Fourth, according to Christine et al. (2019), proactive purpose-driven marketing thought can be used to address the world's various economic, social, and political problems, such as understanding the nuanced implications of different real-life marketing strategies deployed in political campaigns.

Consequently, the current study seeks to examine first, the influence of CPE on actual voter behaviour in the 2020 general election in Ghana, a democratic developing economy with peculiar partisan, political, psychographic, and demographic characteristics. Second, the study investigates the moderating role of personal political salience on the baseline relationship, motivated by inconsistent results in the extant literature, context-specific peculiarities that affect CPE measures, and the desire to advance the field of political marketing communications.

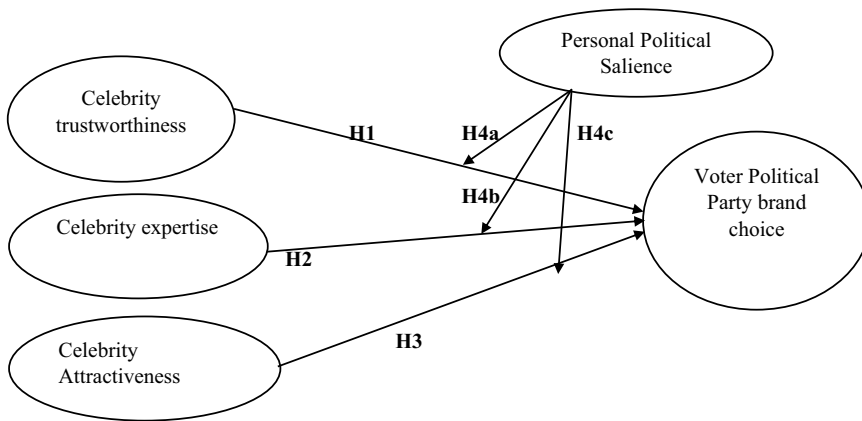
## Literature review and hypotheses development

### *Celebrity political endorsement (CPE)*

Celebrities have long been used to advance brand equity, communicate brand values, improve recalls, and attract the needed consumer attention (Kaur and Sohal 2022; Smith 2001; Seno and Lukas, 2007). Inspired by earlier generic and commercial definitions of celebrity brand endorsement (Erdogan 1999; McCracken 1989; Zhou and Whitla 2013), CPE can be defined as a recognisable and famous person publicly approving and lending support to the ideology and policy of a political party and or a political candidate. What sets commercial celebrity brand endorsement apart from the CPE practice in political marketing is the recruitment and contractual relationships that are integral to the former but lacking in the latter (Erdogan 1999). Often, celebrities who endorse political parties do so voluntarily, thus, without transactional motives, probably because of the conviction that the endorsed political party offers superior solutions to a nation's problems (vonSikorski, Knoll, and Matthes 2018). In a thorough examination of the distinctive types of celebrity political involvement, Marsh et al. (2010) identified five major delineations: celebrity advocate, celebrity activist/endorser, celebrity politician, politician celebrity, and politician who leverages others' celebrity. These varied operationalisations help the parties' and candidates' campaigns to acquire favourable publicity and establish their causes, programs, and beliefs as legitimate ones (Smith 2001). Yet, the practical challenge in the CPE domain is the likelihood of this political marketing communication strategy evoking negative voter attitudes for which the recruitment and selection process must be thoughtful, strategic, and supported by marketing research (Jagdish and Kamakura 1995; Knoll and Matthes 2017). Celebrities who endorse political parties or candidates actively campaign for them across various media channels, espousing the endorsed political brand's unique value proposition relative to competitors' offerings, often without charge.

## Source credibility

The credibility of the sources 'is the phrase generally used to indicate the good attributes of a communicator that influence the reception of the message', says Ohanian (1990, 40). Celebrity endorsement literature relies heavily on the trustworthiness of endorsing celebrities as a source (Moraes et al. 2019; Ohanian 1991; Spry et al., 2011). Various criteria were used by researchers in the 1950s and 1960s to define source credibility. The source-credibility model developed by Hovland et al. (1953) identifies knowledge and trustworthiness as two characteristics that influence the credibility of a source. Other elements that affect a source's credibility have been identified by scholars as a consequence of the initial conceptualisation during the years since. These include qualities like attractiveness and dynamism, competence and objectivity, safety, similarity, and understanding and homophily (Brann and Leezer Himes 2010; Kamins et al. 1989, 1989; Kertz and Ohanian 1992; McCroskey and Teven 1999; Ohanian 1990). Source expertise and trustworthiness are the two most important factors used to assess a source's credibility for different types of behavioural outcomes (Applbaum and Anatol 1972; David, Spence, and Van Der Heide 2014; Luo et al. 2013). Until now, there has been little consistency in how the effectiveness and influence of endorsers might be measured (Bergkvist and Qiang Zhou 2016). Celebrity credibility has been demonstrated to have a favourable effect on brand evaluations in studies by Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) and Frizzell (2011), while in some cases, celebrity attributes like competence produced insignificant results (e.g., Eisend and Langner 2010; Ohanian 1991; Rossiter and Smidts 2012), indicating differing outcomes (Halder, Pradhan, and RoyChaudhuri 2021). Furthermore, despite its centrality to product and brand evaluations and outcomes, the source credibility model (Ohanian 1990) has received surprisingly little attention in the political marketing and communication literature. The current study incorporates three components of source credibility (Ohanian 1990) which are relevant to the study's context-specific peculiarities such as collectivistic cultural inclinations with an obvious well-integrated societal framework that encourages interdependence among citizens (Osei-Frimpong, Donkor, and Owusu-Frimpong 2019). Indeed, high-context cultural characteristics such as hierarchy, power, interpersonal relations, and the reliance on other non-verbal cues like values, trust, status, and associations make the source credibility model an ideal adoption in this study, especially in political marketing communications within a high-context cultural setting. The meanings of messages are understood according to the intuition and reflection of the audience, as a result of the social construction and standard beliefs in high-context cultures like Ghana. As a result, the audience's interpretation of a message will depend on their familiarity with the context in which it was delivered (Zhou and Whitla 2013). Osei-Frimpong, Donkor and Owusu-Frimpong (2019) authored the foremost study that examined celebrity endorsement in Ghana leveraging the source credibility model. This study assumes the same approach but in the context of political marketing communications. The assumption is that – voters are more inclined to choose a political brand associated with a trustworthy, attractive, and knowledgeable celebrity. These qualities could be theorised as the endorsers' equity which influences voters' choice at the polls. These dimensions are subsequently discussed, and each of their hypotheses is put forth.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework exhibiting hypothesised relationships between the theorised dimensions of celebrity political endorsement, voter political salience and voter political party brand choice.

## Conceptual framework

Figure 1 depicts the hypothesised relationships the study examined. The independent variable is conceptualised based on assumptions made from earlier studies on source credibility. Three constructs (celebrity trustworthiness, celebrity expertise and celebrity attractiveness) constitute celebrity political brand endorsement dimensions theorised to assume a direct relationship that is likely to influence voters' choice of an endorsed political party/candidate at the polls. Voters' personal political salience is hypothesised as an interaction term in the given relationship.

Chou (2015) and Halder et al. (2021) assert that researchers often predict or explain CPE effects by the source credibility model (focusing on endorsers' expertise and trustworthiness; Jackson and Darrow 2005), the source attractiveness model (stressing endorsers' likability, familiarity, and physical attractiveness; Jackson and Darrow 2005), meaning transfer theory (McCracken 1989), match-up hypothesis (Kamins 1990), and balance theory (Heider 1958). The current study employs the source credibility and attractiveness models similar to Ohanian's, 1990 tri-component model to explain celebrity political endorsement and actual voter choice in a presidential election.

## Dimensions of Celebrity Political Endorsement and Voter Behaviour

### *Celebrity trustworthiness and voter political brand choice*

Trustworthiness, as defined by Hovland et al. (1953), is the degree to which the listener has confidence in and accepts the communicator and the message. Rossiter and Smidts (2012) observed no positive influence on consumer brand judgments of trustworthiness because 'obviously paid' celebrities would be granted a moderate level of trust. Instead, the other components of a presenter's credibility, such as their high perceived competence, were more important, they found. Frizzell (2011), on the other hand, discovered a positive correlation between endorser credibility and brand equity, utilising endorser

credibility as a unidimensional concept with trustworthiness in its composition. When trustworthiness is considered an independent variable, Bergkvist and Qiang Zhou (2016) conclude that it appears to have no effect on brand ratings. In this regard, the source credibility literature appears to submit little consistency on the effectiveness of trustworthiness and positive behavioural outcomes. The current study agrees with the earlier assertion by Rossiter and Smidts (2012) on the exchange and commercialisation that characterises endorsement deals. In the context of political marketing, however, political parties as non-commercial entities do not necessarily engage celebrities to endorse their brands in exchange for cash. CPE is primarily voluntary and fundamentally typifies a celebrity's democratic right to support or endorse a political party and its candidate in the electioneering process. These features compared to the commercial context offer a probability of voters trusting the source of the message, especially when there are no apparent transactional motivations, and the endorsed brand is non-commercial. Additionally, the endorser's social status and sometimes de facto political leadership heightens the possibility (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2020); hence the study predicts that:

**H1:** The trustworthiness of a celebrity will positively influence voters' choice of a political party brand in an election.

### ***Celebrity expertise and voter political brand choice***

Concerning source expertise, it has been deduced that the source, that is, a celebrity communicator is seen as a source of valid assertions. An endorser's perceived level of abilities, knowledge, and understanding of a chosen career is defined as their level of 'expertise'. Other studies have substituted several synonyms for expertise, such as 'authoritativeness' (McCroskey 1966), 'competence' (Whitehead 1968), 'expertness' (Applbaum and Anatol 1972), and 'qualification' (Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz 1969). An endorser's expertise is analogous to the source's capability, and it is most likely to have a direct effect on the level of conviction needed to persuade customers to buy the recommended brand. For Rossiter and Smidts (2012), celebrity endorsers are seen as experts who improve persuasion, while inexperienced celebrities clearly deter consumers from buying the endorsed products. Till and Busler (2000) have shown in the past that competence has a favourable impact on brand attitudes and purchase intentions. In that general regard, customers' perceptions of celebrity endorsers' high level of competence are likely to be persuaded by persuasive advertising messages with endorsement features (Amos, Holmes, and Strutton 2008; Ohanian 1991; Speck, Schumann, and Thompson 1988). As a result, it is assumed that a celebrity with high competence will be more persuasive than a celebrity with low perceived expertise. For example, a highly decorated musician is unquestionably competent and a suitable choice to endorse a musical instrument, according to Christian and Hunt (2020). Similarly, a doctor with technical knowledge and years of training has the relevant expertise to represent a pharmaceutical product. Chou (2014), on the other hand, offered evidence which was somewhat contradictory to these claims of

celebrity expertise. The author posits that compared to the political figure endorsement, party ads endorsed by either a common citizen or an entertainer can result in voters becoming more favourable towards and increasing their intention to vote for the advertised political party. In the context of political marketing, it should consequently indicate that political personalities, particularly those with a degree of neutrality, will be the most effective advocates of a political party and its candidate. We take these discussions further in this study arguing that voters may also extrapolate the perception of expertise demonstrated by celebrities in their chosen professions (e.g., sports, show business and entertainment) to their political endorsement messages. The competency equity accrued from a celebrity's career could be equated to general knowledgeability, especially in a high-context culture. Additionally, it may be inferred that celebrities who have consistently supported and endorsed certain political parties and are vocal on political issues have some degree of conventional political expertise and may even be thought to possess a substantial amount of political knowledge. Following these discussions, the current study seeks to bring some harmony to the conflicting findings of the 'source expertise' dimension and contribute to the literature by empirically testing the following hypothesis in the CPE domain:

**H2:** The expertise of a celebrity will positively influence voters' choice of a political party brand and its candidate in an election.

### ***Celebrity attractiveness and voter political brand choice***

Physical attractiveness, along with trustworthiness and expertise, is an essential and heuristic element in assessing a source's credibility (Marie, Liu, and Mattila 2019; Ohanian 1991). Existing marketing communications research shows that physical attractiveness is a significant cue in consumers' initial evaluation of another person (Kahle and Homer 1985; Petroschius and Crocker 1989; Pornpitakpan 2003) and in product judgements (Marie, Liu, and Mattila 2019). As a result, customers are more likely to believe the information they receive from an attractive source (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018) which will result in a positive outlook in customers' journey to purchase. This positive influence of attractiveness is termed the halo effect, a type of cognitive bias where the brain permits certain characteristics to favourably influence how an individual is assessed and is often assumed to possess positive personality traits and attributes (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977; Hand and Scott 2022). The volunteerism and minimal rigour and strategy applied to recruiting and accepting celebrity endorsements in political marketing communications challenges Ohanian's (1990) operationalisation of attractiveness (classy, handsome/beautiful, elegant, and sexy). Even though it may hold true for commercial endorsements, celebrities who endorse political parties/candidates often do so on their own volition for which the political parties may not base their judgements on Ohanian's (1990) delineated endorser traits. As such the current study leverages the attractiveness dimension of McGuire's (1985) 'source valence' model which argues that the effectiveness of

a message depends on sources' familiarity, 'likability', 'similarity', and 'attractiveness' to the audiences. To that end, we argue that:

**H3:** A celebrity endorser's attractiveness will positively influence voters' choice of a political party brand and its candidate in an election.

### ***The moderating role of personal political salience (PPS)***

The theoretical mechanism for the moderating effect of message involvement (Wheeler 2009) and product involvement is provided by the elaboration probability model (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). The term 'elaboration' was coined by psychologists Petty and Cacioppo (1986) to describe how much emphasis people put on a certain event or thing. Tormala and Petty (2004) and Nancy and Tybout (1999) argue that consumers' involvement in the decision-making process affects how seriously they consider the credibility of the information source. Relatedly, in the CPE context, a person's proclivity to absorb political events, topics, or ideologies can be classified as having personal political salience (hereafter, PPS) (Jackson and Darrow 2005). A voter's or citizen's deeper emotional connection and investments in issues and developments in the broader socio-political context are involved in this sort of salience. Because of this, PPS illustrates an all-encompassing tendency of citizens to assign political issues meanings and/or emotional value (Jackson and Darrow 2005). Ekant et al. (2010), the first authors to test the relevance of PPS on voter intentions concluded that voters who do not exhibit salience on political issues are unlikely to be influenced by celebrity endorsements while those who are interested and are attached to political happenings are likely to be influenced by it. In an earlier study, Jackson and Darrow (2005) uncovered a positive relationship between PPS and the immediate and fast processing of political and ideological issues indicating the respondents' overall greater appreciation of the connection between their personal lives and socio-political issues. As a differential variable at the personal level, some people find events occurring in political contests fairly insignificant, as such, their emotions, attitudes and behaviours are not invested and consequently affected. Conversely, others are very much affected by happenings in the broader political, historical, and social contexts which in turn affect their behaviours, emotions, and attitudes intimately. Generally, the influence of issues on party choice has been a matter of long-standing debates (Johns 2010). In the Ghanaian context compared to developed and other high-earned emerging economies, several peculiarities could attenuate the effect of issue salience or PPS on voter choice. Low educational levels, unflinching party affiliations and loyalty resulting in an almost permanent duopoly state among others may preclude Ghana from having the same evidence of PPS influencing the relationship between CPE and voter choice. Despite these noticeable mitigating factors, the plurality of the Ghanaian media landscape and the upsurge in social media usage have rigorously enhanced news consumption and have heightened political engagements and discourse in the country. The de facto duopoly of Ghana, along with the high stakes and interests associated with its general elections, guarantees that the average Ghanaian follows the country's political and social developments with keen interest (Ovadia, 2011; Gyekye-

Jandoh 2016;). Therefore, it is expected that the average Ghanaian voter shall exhibit high political silence and involvement in processing CPEs manifested along the three hypothesised dimensions which may consequently influence their electoral choice. Hence:

**H4a:** Personal political salience would moderate the relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and voters' choice of a political party brand and its candidate in an election.

**H4b:** Personal political salience would moderate the relationship between celebrity expertise and voters' choice of a political party brand and its candidate in an election.

**H4c:** Personal political salience would moderate the relationship between celebrity attractiveness and voters' choice of a political party brand and its candidate in an election.

## Method

Considering the complexity of the study's proposed model and objectives, a quantitative research approach through a cross-sectional survey design was employed. The cross-sectional design is deemed fit to ascertain whether celebrity endorsement in political marketing communications influenced voters' choice of a presidential candidate and party in a specific election – the 2020 Ghanaian general elections. The approach was employed to obtain measurable and objective data from respondents who are registered voters and participated (voted to elect a president) in the said election. In the lead-up to the 2020 general elections, key celebrities declared their support mainly to the two dominant political parties which were obvious because of the duopolistic nature of the country's multi-party system. Twelve candidates appeared on the ballot paper from which one must emerge a winner of the election. Between the two main political parties (The National Democratic Congress and The New Patriotic Party), the most common celebrity endorsers were entertainers, and entertainers turned politicians (celebrity politicians). The celebrities declared their support through social media engagements, speeches at political campaigns and political advertising through multiple media channels. For emphasis, the literature indicates that such moves have a tremendous influence on the public's perception of a candidate (Chou 2015; Wood and Herbst 2007).

## Measures

A questionnaire was developed to elicit objective and measurable responses as a measurement instrument. Scale items were borrowed from the extant literature. Celebrity attractiveness was measured with 4 items (e.g., I found the personalities of the celebrities elegant) selected and adapted from the scholarly works of McGuire (1985); Ohanian (1990). The scale items for celebrity expertise were measured using 5 items (e.g., The celebrities are knowledgeable in their respective careers) selected and adapted from the scholarly works of Ohanian (1990) and Pornpitakpan (2003). Four scale items (e.g., The celebrities have always manifested honesty) were adapted to measure celebrity

trustworthiness were selected and adapted from Pornpitakpan (2003) who presented a validation of the celebrity endorser's credibility scale. Five items (e.g., I am emotionally connected to political and social issues in Ghana) from Veer, Becirovic and Eisend and Langner (2010) and Jackson and Darrow (2005) were employed to measure voters' personal political salience. Finally, six scale items (e.g., Generally, the celebrity endorsements influenced my assessments of the political parties and I voted for the endorsed party) used to measure voter political brand choice were selected and adapted from Ahmed, Lodhi, and Ahmad (2017). A Likert scale on a range of 1–5 measuring 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' were used to gather responses to each question asked in the instrument.

### ***Sample design, data collection and analysis***

The population was registered voters who participated in the 2020 elections. Thus, a purposeful sampling technique was employed to reach respondents who were registered voters and participated in the 2020 general elections (parliamentary and presidential) with a purposive focus on the presidential votes because the endorsements witnessed in the lead to the elections were largely targeted at the presidential candidates. An argument could however be raised about the collateral and generalisable effects of such endorsements on the party at large and hence, its parliamentary candidates. Nonetheless, for specificity and for the avoidance of broad generalisations stemming from the obvious distinctions in voters' choice between a party's presidential candidate and a candidate for the legislature, the focus was narrowed to presidential elections and consequently, voters. The Total number of registered voters for the Ghanaian 2020 elections was 17, 027, 641. For cost and time constraints a sample of 1500 respondents who were registered voters and visited selected polling stations to cast their ballots were considered for representation and subsequent data collection. Using the intercept mode, voters were contacted right after casting their ballots and away from the immediate environment of the voting centres. Out of the 33, 367 polling stations (voting centres) across 16 regions and 275 constituencies, trained data collection personnel were distributed among 300 polling stations across 8 regions and 15 constituencies. Ethical considerations were highly observed and communicated to participants through the trained data collection personnel. Questionnaire administration was concurrent across the sample population and locations between 8 am and 5 pm, on voting day. The obvious exclusion criteria were citizens who did not cast a presidential ballot. Additionally, the celebrity endorsers articulated their messages via their owned social media platforms, through new songs and versus, specifically celebrity musicians, and among others, rallies that were covered live and as news bulletin by traditional media. Key exclusion or inclusion criteria therefore were preliminary questions on how respondents heard, followed, and consumed the various endorsements messages from their favourite celebrities.

For the demographic data, IBM SPSS was used and SmartPLS3.3.3 was employed to perform partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the stated hypotheses. There are two main justifications for using PLS in this study. For one, it facilitates a comprehensive test of the conceptual framework (Hair et al., 2012). Second, PLS allows for the estimation of numerous causal links between multiple independent

variables and single or many dependent variables at the same time, as is the situation in our study (Medsker, Williams, & Holahan, 1994). Other reasons for the choice include its high predictive capacity and flexibility in model estimation, (Hair et al., 2019) and its causal-predictive approach to SEM, which places emphasis on prediction when generating statistical models to explain causal correlations (Wold, 1980; Sarstedt, Ringle and Hair 2017). A total of 1463 responses were received out of the 1500 estimated sample. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic data of the study sample.

The table demonstrates the age and gender distribution of the respondents. By the dictates of the Ghanaian constitution, the qualified voting age is 18 years and above and this, the respondents met. To properly publish the outcomes of the PLS-SEM analysis, we adhered to the guidelines set forth by Hair et al. (2019). The measurement model's evaluation results are presented first, followed by the structural model.

### **Measurement model**

The assessment of the measurement model is crucial because it checks the precision and accuracy of the scales used to measure the latent constructs and their observable variables (Loehlin, 1998; 2004). In this regard, construct reliability, indicator reliability, convergence and discriminant validity are assessed in this first phase of the process (Hair et al., 2017). The item loadings, average variance extracted (AVEs), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha (CA) values are shown in Table 2. Cronbach's alpha (at a cut-off of 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE) (at a cut-off of 0.50) were used to evaluate construct reliability, and composite reliability (0.70). All items were loaded primarily on their specified constructs. The Average Variance Extracted [AVE] (0.50) was used to determine convergent validity, whereas the Fornell-Larcker (0.50), outer loadings (0.70), or Heterotrait-Monotrait [HTMT] (0.85 or 0.90) ratio was employed to determine discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). As demonstrated in Table 2, both the convergent and discriminant validity were satisfactory for moving further with the analysis (Speck, Schumann, and Thompson 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The lowest loaded item scored 0.749, and the highest was 0.948. As all items were greater than the 0.70 cut-offs, none were removed. This indicates that the constructs explain more than 50% of the indicator's variance, thus providing acceptable item reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.907 to 0.953, showing a high degree of reliability. Similarly, the composite reliability obtained good values between 0.931 and 0.962. Both the AVEs and the rho\_A rated high, with values ranging from 0.73 to 0.832 and from 0.926 to 0.96, respectively. Indicator reliability is evaluated based on the indicator loadings and their statistical significance. PLS-Algorithm is used to determine indicator loadings with a criterion of 0.50 to 0.70, and bootstrapping is used to evaluate statistical significance. Again, from Table 2, VPBC1 = 0.77, VPPS1 = 0.749, CTrst1 = 0.874, and CAtra4 = 0.864 are all statistically significant. For internal consistency which depicts the relationship between constructs, the results indicates that the Cronbach alpha obtained for each construct met the threshold (Celebrity Attractiveness = 0.917, Celebrity Expertise = 0.918, Celebrity trustworthiness = 0.933, Personal Political Salience = 0.907 and Voter political brand choice = 0.953.) which demonstrates that they are all correlated. The table further presents a minimum AVE of 0.73 and a maximum of 0.832 which exceeds the minimum threshold (0.50) prescribed by Hair et al., (2017) for convergent validity.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of respondents.

	Frequency	Percent (100)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	785	53.64
Female	678	46.36
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
18–19	189	16.6
20–29	469	45.1
30–39	502	22.3
40–50	197	9.7
Above 50	106	6.3

**Table 2** Item Loadings, Average Variance Extracted, Cronbach alpha and Composite reliability of constructs for Celebrity Trustworthiness, Celebrity Expertise, Celebrity Attractiveness, Personal Political Salience and Voter Political Brand Choice.

Construct	Item	Loadings	AVE	CR	rho_A	CA
<i><b>Celebrity Trustworthiness</b></i>						
The celebrities have always exhibited sincerity	CTrst1	0.874	0.832	0.952	0.941	0.933
The celebrities are reliable and dependable	CTrst2	0.925				
The celebrities have always manifested honesty	CTrst3	0.94				
The celebrities can be always trusted	CTrst4	0.907				
<i><b>Celebrity Trustworthiness</b></i>						
The celebrities are knowledgeable in their respective careers	CExp1	0.864	0.75	0.938	0.938	0.918
The assume skilfulness and competence in their respective careers	CExp2	0.881				
They are experts in their various field of endeavour	CExp3	0.876				
They possess a great wealth of experience	CExp4	0.878				
The celebrities are generally well informed	CExp5	0.831				
<i><b>Celebrity Attractiveness</b></i>						
I found the personalities of the celebrities physically attractive	CAtra1	0.882	0.8	0.941	0.928	0.917
I found the personalities of the celebrities elegant	CAtra2	0.912				
Their personalities matched with my self-concept	CAtra3	0.918				
I admire the personalities of the celebrities and they influence me on a number of things	CAtra4	0.864				
<i><b>Voters' Personal Political Salience</b></i>						
I am emotionally connected to political and social issues in Ghana	VPPS1	0.749	0.73	0.931	0.926	0.907
I follow regularly, governance and political news	VPPS2	0.898				
I am routinely attentive to public policy and politics	VPPS3	0.921				
I find politics and policy important, and they inform my electoral choice	VPPS4	0.904				
I am an independent voter, I voted for the political party with the most convincing policy and plan	VPPS5	0.785				
<i><b>Voters' political brand choice</b></i>						
The celebrity endorsements influenced my preference of political party at the polls	VPBC1	0.77	0.811	0.962	0.961	0.953
My loyalty to my favourite political party was intensified with the celebrity endorsements	VPBC2	0.883				
I switched from my favourite political party to vote for another because of the celebrity endorsements	VPBC3	0.935				
As a swing voter, a favourite celebrity endorsement influenced my choice of political party in the last general elections	VPBC4	0.947				
I voted because my favourite celebrity endorsed the political party, I associate with	VPBC5	0.948				
Generally, the celebrity endorsements impacted my assessments of the political parties and I voted for the endorsed party	VPBC6	0.908				

**Table 3.** Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Table

	Celebrity Attractiveness	Celebrity Expertise	Celebrity trustworthiness	Personal Political Saliency
Celebrity Attractiveness				
Celebrity Expertise	0.5			
Celebrity trustworthiness	0.699	0.617		
Personal Political Saliency	0.163	0.067	0.164	
Voter political brand choice	0.579	0.324	0.576	0.349

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) technique was employed to analyse construct validity (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2017). Values were far below the cut-off of 0.85, as seen in Table 3 (Henseler et al., 2015). It emerges from the data that each construct in the structural model is empirically distinct from the others.

### **Structural model**

Examining the model's predictive relevance and accuracy is part of the structural model evaluation process. The effect sizes were examined, and the study's hypotheses were tested in this general regard. The process began with the variable inflation factor (VIF) for which all constructs in the model was less than 5.0 (Celebrity Attractiveness = 1.788, Celebrity Expertise = 1.551, Celebrity trustworthiness = 2.124, Personal Political Saliency = 1.049). Thus, the study's constructs have no challenges with multicollinearity.

A non-parametric bootstrapping was used for the path significance and hypothesis testing. The standard error of coefficient estimations was calculated to assess the level of statistical significance of the coefficients. Hair et al. (2017) states that a p-value of less than 0.05 is necessary to determine the significance of a relationship at a 5% significant level. Given that the P-values were less than 0.05, the hypothesised relationships between celebrity political endorsement and voter political brand preference manifested along two out of the three dimensions – celebrity attractiveness and celebrity trustworthiness. Thus, both were positive and significant. Accordingly, because its P-value (0.336) was above the 0.05 cut-off, there was no correlation between celebrity expertise and voter political brand choice.

### **Hypotheses testing- direct relationships**

The results of the structural path indicate a significant relationship between celebrity trustworthiness, celebrity attractiveness and voters' political party brand choice confirming and finding support for H1 and H3. Contrariwise, H2 was not significant and did not find support in the structural model. Table 4 demonstrates these results.

After examining the baseline relationships, the moderating test was run on the significant baseline correlations that had been previously found. The relationship between celebrity expertise and voter political brand choice was expunged from the model since it was unsupported in the path analysis. Subsequently, the moderating variable Personal Political Saliency was tested on the two significant relationships, Celebrity Attractiveness -> Voter political brand choice and Celebrity

**Table 4.** Structural path results *Hypotheses testing- moderated relationships.*

Hypotheses	Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
H1	Celebrity trustworthiness -> Voter political brand choice	0.349	0.345	0.068	5.167	0.00
H2	Celebrity Expertise -> Voter political brand choice	-0.047	-0.043	0.049	0.963	0.34
H3	Celebrity Attractiveness -> Voter political brand choice	0.349	0.351	0.054	6.471	0.00

**Table 5.** Moderation effect.

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
CAtra*VPPS -> VPBC	-0.054	-0.047	0.065	0.823	0.41
CTrst*VPPS ->VPBC	0.138	0.129	0.069	2.017	0.04

trustworthiness -> Voter political brand choice. The results displayed in Table 5 indicate a weak and insignificant link between personal political salience and celebrity attractiveness and the choice of political brand (= -0.05, t-stats=0.82, p-value=0.41). In effect, the relationship between celebrity attractiveness and voter political brand choice is not affected by the personal political salience of the voter. In contrast, a positive and statistically significant association was found between the interaction effect of personal political salience and celebrity trustworthiness -> Voter political brand choice relationship (=0.13, t-stats=2.017, p-value=0.04). In simple terms, voters’ personal political salience may strengthen the relationship between their trust for celebrities that endorse a political party brand and their choice of that party by way of a voting decision. Specifically, H4a was accepted as the only significant hypothesised moderated relationship among the CPE dimensions, personal political salience, and voter political brand choice. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 6 displays the results of the model’s predictive accuracy (R<sup>2</sup>), predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>) and effect sizes (f<sup>2</sup>). An examination of the model’s predictive accuracy (R<sup>2</sup>) indicates that the dependent variable, voter political party brand choice obtained a moderate R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.37. This suggests that, on average, a celebrity’s political party/candidature endorsement (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) accounts for around 37% of the overall variation in a voter’s choice of political party brand. Similarly, Table 5 presents an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.36 which also indicates that the exogenous variables present in the model moderately explain voters’ choice of political party brand, despite the fall in

**Table 6.** Predictive accuracy (R<sup>2</sup>), predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>) and effect sizes (F<sup>2</sup>).

Constructs	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>
Voters’ political party brand choice	0.37	0.29	
Celebrity trustworthiness			0.09
Celebrity expertise			0.00
Celebrity attractiveness			0.10

**Table 7.** Control Variables.

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
Age -> Voter political brand choice	-0.06	-0.06	0.04	1.334	0.18
Gender -> Voter political brand choice	0.06	0.06	0.04	1.565	0.11

**Table 8.** Summary of structural model assessments – tested hypotheses and results.

H	Hypothesis Pathways	Path Coefficient	P-value	t-value	Results
H1	Celebrity trustworthiness -> Voter political brand choice	0.35	0.00	5.17	Supported
H2	Celebrity Expertise -> Voter political party brand choice	-0.05	0.34	0.96	Not Supported
H3	Celebrity Attractiveness -> Voter political party brand choice	0.35	0.00	6.47	Supported
H4a	CTrst*VPPS -> Voter political party brand choice	-0.05	0.41	0.82	Not supported
H4c	CAtra*VPPS -> Voter political party brand choice	0.14	0.04	2.02	Supported

the value of  $R^2$ . The constructs'  $f^2$  values are also shown in [Table 6](#), which reveals two of the three predictors have effect sizes that are less than 0.02 and, as a result, their removal will not significantly alter the model. This indicates that the model is unaffected by how well each variable helps to understand the political party and candidate brand endorsement. Even though celebrity expertise has a 0.00 effect size, it was kept in the analysis because of its relevance in celebrity endorsement models in extant literature. In this study, the endogenous variable exhibits enough predictive power. The construct cross-validated redundancy ( $Q^2$ ) for the endogenous variable, voter political party brand choice, in [Table 5](#) is 0.29. The construct's predictive significance is acceptable because this number is greater than 0 (Chin 2009) [Table 8](#).

### Results of the control variables

According to the results displayed in [Table 7](#) neither age nor gender had any statistically significant effect on voters' preference for a particular political party brand or candidate

### Discussions and theoretical implications

Whereas the celebrity endorsement practice has received considerable research attention, especially in the context of products, services, and thus profit-driven organisations, little research attention has been paid to the adoption of marketing communication strategies by not-for-profit businesses, specifically, political actors and parties. This study empirically submits evidence for the relationship between the endorsement of political parties by celebrities and its influence on voters' choices at the polls. Two out of the three dimensions of Nancy and Tybout's (1999) source credibility model, thus celebrity attractiveness and trustworthiness influenced voters' choice at the polls. Additionally, voters' personal political salience strengthened the relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and voters' choice of a political party brand. These novel findings are

supported in part by previous research conducted by Mishra and Mishra (2014), Ekant et al. (2010), Kaur and Sohal (2022) and Banerjee and Chaudhuri, (2022).

The findings generally reiterate a seeming ubiquitous relevance of celebrities in influencing consumer behaviour in both commercial and non-commercial settings. On the specifics, however, it adds to the growing body of evidence that celebrity endorsements significantly influence the chances of political parties at the polls (Kang and Herr, 2006; Mishra and Mishra 2014) mainly through the political parties' brand personalities (Kaur and Sohal 2022). In the context of political advertising, the study makes significant theoretical contributions by confirming the relevance of celebrity endorsements of political parties along two dimensions, celebrity trustworthiness (**H1**) and attractiveness (**H3**). The findings confirm the theoretical reasonings behind the celebrity endorsement theory. It explains that the mental associations established in voters' minds through the endorsement of political parties and candidates enhance the brand personality of the political parties and subsequently voters' decisions or choices at the polls. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it is the first of its kind to quantify Ohanian's (1990) tri-component source credibility model and to validly assess the influence of each component of a celebrity endorser's persuasiveness in the context of political marketing communications and real-life voters' political decisions. In this regard, voters in the Ghanaian 2020 general elections confirmed that celebrities that lend their support through multiple forms of marketing communications influenced their decisions at the polls, and they considered their attractiveness and trustworthiness mainly in accepting their endorsement messages which in turn influenced their choice of a political party brand and its respective presidential candidate. The results provide important contributions to the literature on political marketing communications by highlighting the essential attributes of celebrity political endorsers that are likely to shape voters' perceptions in analysing political communications to make a voting decision. Endorsement is a crucial component of any successful marketing communication strategy; it is rapidly changing in both practice and research and has gained acceptance in all parts of the world. Indeed, the seminal works of Ohanian's (1990, 1991) that birthed the measurement of celebrity endorsement and have been widely tested once again proves that celebrities wield high degree of influence that are expressed in certain constructs and lenses through which consumers assess the authenticity of celebrities' messages to persuade them, specifically in the context of endorsements.

Additionally, the political salience of voters strengthened the relationship between celebrities' trustworthiness and voters' choice of the endorsed political party brand. Also referred to as political product involvement (Banerjee and Chaudhuri, 2019), political salience, thus voters' interests in politics in general and elections are likely to enhance their trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser and then their choice of the endorsed political party at the polls. The study further expands the current understanding of celebrity endorsements in political marketing communications by further submitting that the perception and thoughts of voters about celebrity endorsement of political parties/candidates do not cause them to act differently irrespective of their demographic characteristics. Summarily and inferentially, the reaction of voters, in terms of choice to the use of celebrities by political parties is not influenced by age or gender.

## Practical contributions and implications

The study makes reasonable and significant additions to the political marketing communications literature. It submits that political parties and their candidates especially in developing countries, could become a favourable choice for voters should a political party be endorsed by a celebrity. To this extent, the core components that positively influence voters' choice relative to celebrities lending their support and publicly endorsing political parties/candidates by way of political advertising among other marketing communication tools are unearthed in the study. In as much as political marketing is a public endeavour and inherently non-profit and for which every celebrity depending on factors such as their ideologies and policies, could lend their support and endorsement, political marketers must avert their minds to the attributes and cues that voters consider in a celebrity. These core cues are what voters look out for in any political marketing communications that involve a celebrity endorser. Thus, the study submits that how trustworthy and attractive a celebrity political endorser is to the audience may determine the persuasiveness of their messages to voters. In this regard, the study makes a very important call to political marketers and scientists to be strategic and very deliberate in recruiting and admitting celebrities for endorsement and not assume that so long as it is a social cause, anyone popular and has a following could endorse a political party or an electoral candidate. That could turn out as 'expensive free publicity' which could instead, jeopardise the fortunes of the political party brand and its candidates at the polls. In their political marketing communications, political parties are encouraged to deploy celebrity endorsements. However, celebrities must be deliberately and strategically recruited. More so, they must be familiar, attractive, likeable, sincere, dependable, honest, and trusted among other significant qualities that fall within the trustworthiness and attractiveness spectrum. Additionally, voters' involvement and interest in political issues and electoral processes are likely to cause them to have a favourable outlook towards a political party/candidate in the context of political endorsements. This however is driven solely by the trustworthiness of the celebrity endorser. As a result, the greater a voter's political knowledge, the greater the possibility that the voter will be particularly interested in the authenticity and believability of the celebrity communicator and the message. The evidence reemphasises the trustworthiness dimension of the source credibility model, in that, celebrity endorsers need to be trusted among politically salient voters in order to be influenced by their endorsement messages. Ordinarily, compared to commercial marketing, political party endorsement motives are considered non-rewarding and are rather for the advancement of general societal wellbeing. As a result, celebrity trustworthiness should not have been a critical consideration in the tri-component model. The findings rather submit compelling evidence of the trustworthiness of celebrity endorsers directly influencing voters' choice and a relevant component of voters' political involvement and voter political party brand choice. It implies that once a politically involved voter trusts the source (celebrity endorser) of a message, that voter is likely to be positively influenced by the message and to choose the endorsed political brand or candidate at the polls.

## Limitations and directions for future studies

Even though the study does not assume that political party endorsement by celebrities solely influences voter choice at the polls, investigating the specific political marketing communication activities, medium/channel, and strategy if any, utilised by celebrities and their endorsed political parties which influences this positive behaviour is important. Future studies could consider this, especially in an electioneering period while measuring reality other than intentions. Furthermore, even though the study's primary goal was to operationalise Ohanian's (1990) tri-component model in the context of political marketing communications, other important variables, or theoretical models other than the source credibility model (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) could drive positive voter behaviour. Other theoretical postulations such as the meaning transfer (McCracken 1989) and the celebrity brand-fit model (Bergkvist and Qiang Zhou 2016; Till 1998a) could be tested to ascertain the validity of each model in the context of political marketing communications. Likewise, effects between the attitude and behaviour spectrum such as loyalty to the party brand, voluntary advocacy, enthusiasm, and campaign could be measured through longitudinal studies. Celebrity occupation, educational levels, previous political activities, and global phenomena such as health and economic crisis and their impact on a jurisdictional micro/macroeconomy, celebrity's demonstrable civic responsibility and philanthropy could be moderators or mediators.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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