

Celebrity adoption of charitable causes oversold

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Celebrities do have the ability to focus awareness on charitable and political causes but their power to move the news machine to shape policy agendas has been oversold, according to recent research published by SAGE in the October issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics* (IJPP).

The study, led by A. Trevor Thrall, University of Michigan Assistant Professor of Political Science, and colleagues, looked at hundreds of celebrities, grouped in different ways, along with the issues they advocate. The impact they made on the issues was measured by the news stories that were published in both hard news and entertainment news sources.

The researchers found that although 62.8% of the celebrities in the random sample were engaged in celebrity advocacy, conventional wisdom has oversold the powers of the average celebrity to move the news machine to shape policy agendas – especially in hard news. Still, they found that combined star power helped the charities get more attention than those that work with fewer celebrities.

The researchers' work lead to several other conclusions, including:

- Celebrities make brief and irregular appearances in the hard news but do not steer political debate
- Star advocacy does seem to help mobilize and build social movement

infrastructure

-- Celebrities' roles will continue to expand in US politics because of the growth of new media

"As a result of the media's fragmentation, very few issues or people command the public's attention for long," write the authors. "Our study suggests that citizens increasingly act as their own gatekeepers, often relying on Web sites and search engines with no link to the journalistic tradition. Groups will find celebrities and entertainment media increasingly important as mechanisms for targeting and attracting audiences for their messages."

Citation: The October 2008 IJPP article, "Star Power: Celebrity Advocacy and the Evolution of the Public Sphere," written by Assistant Professor of Political Science, A. Trevor Thrall, and Master of Public Policy students: Jaime Lollo-Fakhreddine, Jon Berent, Lana Donnelly, Wes Herrin, Zachary Paquette, Rebecca Wenglinski, and Amy Wyatt at the University of Michigan – Dearborn, is being made freely available by SAGE for a limited time at hij.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/13/4/362.

Source: SAGE Publications

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