

# Celebrity promotion of charities 'is largely ineffective', says research

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Celebrity promotion of charities is ineffective at raising awareness, but can make the stars more popular with the public, new research says.

According to journal articles by three UK academics, "the ability of [celebrity](#) and advocacy to reach people is limited" and celebrities are "generally ineffective" at encouraging people to care about "distant suffering".

The research, by Professor Dan Brockington, of The University of Manchester, Professor Spensor Henson, University of Sussex, and Dr Martin Scott, University of East Anglia, is published at time when many celebrities are campaigning for charity.

Professor Brockington and Professor Henson carried out two surveys, each of over 1,000 people to ask about celebrities and campaigning, as well as running focus groups.

They found that 66% of those surveyed could not link any celebrity with a list of seven well-known charities and aid organisations (NGOs) the researchers mentioned.

"Our survey found that while awareness of major NGOs brands was high, awareness of celebrity advocates for those brands was low," they said in their article, published online in the International Journal of Cultural Studies.

"Instead it was plain from the focus groups that most people supported the charities that they supported because of personal connections in their lives and families which made these causes important, not because of the celebrities.

"The evidence suggests, therefore, that the ability of celebrity advocacy to reach people is limited, and dominated in Britain by some extremely prominent telethons and the work of a few stars."

Celebrities did not support charities in order to promote themselves, but this was the unintended outcome of their work, the researchers said.

"Regardless of what celebrities may want in terms of publicity – and the interviews suggest that many would seek to maximise the attention given to their cause, and not to them – it is clear that the celebrity can often do better out of this attention than their causes."

The seven organisations that two-thirds of people could not associate celebrities with were: Action Aid; Amnesty International; CAFOD; Christian Aid; Oxfam; Save the Children and the Red Cross.

In a separate article in the same journal, Dr Scott said he had conducted focus group observations with 108 people, with almost half keeping diaries on their thoughts about poorer countries.

"In the diaries, only 6% of all entries were about celebrity humanitarianism – almost all of which were about programmes or advertisements in the build-up to Comic Relief," said Dr Scott.

"Celebrities were both valued for their seemingly instrumental role in drawing attention to worthy causes but, at the same time, this was often accompanied by cynical statements [written in the diaries] about their motivations for involvement or about the genuineness of their

emo-tional responses.

"There were still a relatively large number of occasions in which seemingly authentic celebrities did appear to generate a distinct sense of proximity and agency vis-a-vis distant suffering." However, "overall, the results of this research suggest that celebrities are generally ineffective in cultivating a cosmopolitan engagement with distant suffering. In conversations about the mediation of distant others, research participants rarely talked about instances of explicit celebrity humanitarianism."

The research has been flagged up by the Campaign for Social Science as significant for helping understand how charities can raise public knowledge of their work.

Provided by Manchester University

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