Political campaigns in South Africa: Does celebrity endorsement influence the intention to vote?

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Abstract

From presidential campaigns to social awareness campaigns, celebrities have gradually become central fixtures in modern politics. They tend to be information platforms for candidates and parties they either clearly support or officially endorse. South African political parties raised eyebrows when they rallied the country's popular celebrities to publicly endorse them. Political parties spend a significant amount of money on celebrity endorsements as it is believed that celebrities can leverage "secondary brand associations". This leads to the question: does the increased use of celebrity endorsements in political campaigns influence the intention to vote? The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of celebrity political endorsement on intentions to vote. Employing a quantitative research design, 227 respondents were surveyed using a structured questionnaire. The findings show that endorser credibility has a positive significant relationship with political party credibility and voters' intentions. The relationship between political party credibility and voters' intentions is also positive and significant. This study provides managerial implications, limitations and future research.

1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa has a large number of political parties, both national and provincial. According to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa, 48 political parties were on the ballot paper contesting the 2019 elections—an increase of 39.6% from the previous national elections, held in 2014. This increase has led to a degeneration in the strength of party association, and more electorates than ever before are exposed to various stimuli in the electoral arena (Smith & French, 2008). Therefore, the campaigning system in South Africa is still a political party-oriented event, where political parties rely heavily on party ground forces, advertising and celebrities to promote their parties.

From presidential campaigns to social awareness campaigns, celebrities have gradually become central fixtures in many modern political and social platforms (Nisbett & DeWalt, 2016). Movie stars, musicians, personalities and other influential figures promote their positions on political matters and even partake in political activities (Becker, 2013). Furthermore, celebrities campaign on behalf of political parties, political candidates, social policies and social engagement. They have been known to play a significant role in politics (Garthwaite & Moore 2013; Pease & Brewer, 2008; Sanders, 2016) and they tend to be information platforms for candidates and parties whom they either clearly support or officially endorse (Popkin, 1991; Sanders, 2016). "Taking advantage of their fame, celebrities can make public performances on behalf of the candidates, they can campaign alongside the candidates, they can attend public conferences to voice their support, and more recently they can tweet out their endorsement to their millions of followers" (Wang & Luo, 2017, p. 1).

Although celebrity endorsement is not a new phenomenon in the product and brand promotion arena, it is relatively new in the political space. According to Nisbett and DeWalt (2016), political celebrity endorsement is mainly used to target young voters. Brockington and Henson (2015) argue that engaging in politics might be beneficial for celebrity reputation management. As such, some celebrity public relations practitioners encourage political endorsements (Markham, 2015). However, Syvester Chauke, a brand strategist and the founder of DNA brand architects, said "endorsing a political party could be compromising and damaging to the celebrity's personal brand" (Makhoba, 2016, p. 1). He further argues that it might be beneficial for celebrities to remain neutral regarding religion and politics.

According to Makhoba (2016), South African political parties raised eyebrows when they rallied the country's popular celebrities to publicly endorse them. Two of the big political parties in South Africa: the African National Congress (ANC) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) strongly made use of celebrity endorsers during their 2019 election campaigns to promote their political parties and candidates. Celebrities such as AKA, Vusi Nova, Oskido, DJ Mahoota, Rami Chuene, Nina Hastie, and Papa Penny endorsed the ruling party, the ANC (Zeeman, 2019). While celebrities such as Dumi Ntando, Ringo Madlingozi, Gabisile Tshabalala, Tshedi Mholo, Davido, Boity, Casper, Fana Mokeona, and Mmabatho Montsho endorsed the EFF (Okmzanzi, 2019). Political parties happily spend a significant amount of money on celebrity endorsers as it is believed celebrities can leverage "secondary brand associations" (Veer, Becirovic, & Martin, 2010). Therefore, the question is: does the increased use of celebrity endorsements in the political campaigns in South Africa influence the intention to vote?

A rich literature on celebrity endorsement and the impact of celebrity endorsement on attitudes towards the advertisements (Hani, Marwan, & Andre, 2018), attitude towards the brand (Ha & Lam, 2017; Wu & Li, 2013) and purchase intentions (McCormick, 2016; Priyankara, Weerasiri, Dissanayaka, & Jinadasa, 2017) is available. However, the impact of celebrity political endorsement on the intention to vote is relatively under-researched in the field of political marketing (Chou, 2015). In addition, celebrity endorsement has played a prevalent role in political communication, predominantly during election campaigns.

However, research on celebrity political endorsement has focused on Western democracies, with limited studies focusing on emerging democracies such as South Africa.

The limited research on the effects of celebrity political endorsement on voters' attitudes and behaviour has produced mixed results. For instance, the study conducted in the United Kingdom by Couldry and Markham (2007) revealed that people who are interested in celebrities' lifestyles are less likely to have an interest in politics and voting. In addition, the study conducted by Schuessler (2000) established that individuals with a high interest in politics tend to rely on political parties' manifestos, and are unlikely to be influenced by superfluous cues such as celebrity endorsement. However, studies conducted in the United States of America and Canada found that young voters are heavily influenced by celebrity opinions (Austin, Van de Vord, Pinkleton, & Epstein, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Jackson & Darrow, 2005). Veer et al. (2010) maintain that celebrity endorsements influence voters' interest in the endorsed party, which leads to high voter turnouts. Moreover, Pease and Brewer (2008) argue that celebrity political endorsement can intensify support for political candidates to a limited extent. The following section provides the theoretical background leading to the presentation of the hypothesis, method and results, practical implication, limitations of the study and conclusion.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Social influence theory

The notion of celebrity endorsement can be described using the social influence theory (SIT) (Osei-Frimpong, Donkor, & Owusu-Frimpong, 2019). Li (2013) emphasises that SIT explains how people are influenced by others to act in a particular manner. According to Venkatesh and Brown (2001), individuals tend to feel pressured to act in a certain way. Osei-Frimpong et al. (2019) indicate that people tend to influence each other through information sharing. Furthermore, Li (2013) suggests that individuals have a desire to conform to the expectations of others. "This suggests that celebrity endorsements send messages or information about brands that are considered to be credible and real, which could change the individual's perception about the brand, resulting from some form of social identification" (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019, p. 105). Ilicic and Webster (2015), Munnukka, Uusitalo, and Toivonen (2016) and Samu and Wymer (2014) state that source credibility is important in evaluating the information consumers receive.

Numerous scholars have made use of the social influence theory to identify circumstances under which political endorsements will persuade the public to make choices that reflect their preferences (Boudreau, 2018; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019). Ordinary citizens tend not to be interested in obtaining political information themselves as they believe that the cost of obtaining political information outweighs the benefits (Boudreau, 2018). Therefore, the average citizen usually foregoes acquiring political information and instead put their trust in the recommendations of important sources, such as celebrity endorsers (Downs, 1957).

2.2 Celebrity endorsement

Marketers have been using celebrity endorsers to enhance the appeal of brands for a long period of time (Tantiseneepong, Gorton, & White, 2012). In addition, it has been acknowledged as a powerful strategy in modern marketing (Yang, 2018). According to McCracken (1989), a celebrity endorser is defined as an identifiable individual who is employed to advertise for an organisation, product or brand. Compared to the use of non-celebrity individuals, celebrity endorsers tend to enrich the brand's image, attract consumers' attention and improve recall rates (Seno & Lukas, 2007). Dean and Biswas (2001) maintain that celebrity endorsers help adverts to stand out. Choi and Rifon (2007) indicate that the main power of celebrity use in advertisements lies in "para-social" relationships. Caughey (1984) defines a para-social relationship as a feeling of intimate relationship even though there is no direct contact between the celebrity and the consumer. Byrne and Breen (2003, p. 289) argue that

"…a celebrity can build, refresh and add new dimensions. What celebrities stand for enhances a brand and they save valuable time in terms of creating the credibility a company has created in order to build its brand by transferring the values to the brand. When consumers see a credible celebrity endorse a product, they think the company must be okay."

Studies show that one-in-four advertisements in Western countries make use of celebrity endorsers (Doss, 2011; Spry, Pappu, & Bettina Cornwell, 2011; Yang, 2018). Numerous studies also reveal that in East Asian countries—for example, India, Korea and Japan—approximately 60% of advertisements in television incorporate celebrity endorsers (Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005; McCaughan, 2007; Schaefer, Parker, & Kent, 2010; Yang, 2018). Moreover, marketers tend to spend a substantial portion of their marketing budget on reimbursing their celebrity endorsers. Yang (2018) argue that brands spend approximately 10% of their budget compensating celebrity endorsers. For instance, in 2003, Nike spent approximately $1.44 billion compensating celebrity endorsers (Ding, Molchanov, & Stork, 2011). Brands spend their money on celebrity endorsers with intentions to receive return on investment.

2.3 Celebrity political endorsement

Celebrity endorsements have long been considered an effective marketing technique (Brockington & Henson, 2015) and have gradually become common in political campaigns (Dunn & Nisbett, 2017). Jackson and Darrow (2005) argue that celebrity endorsement and political campaigns have increasingly become linked in the past 15 years. In developed democracies, such as the United States of America and United Kingdom, entertainers, athletes, actors, actresses and other influential figures tend to voice their opinions about the political climate in their country with the intention of influencing the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of voters (Wood & Herbst, 2007).

Political marketing research has mostly found that younger individuals are more vulnerable to celebrity endorsement in politics (Jackson & Darrow, 2005). The research established that celebrities intensify support for political candidates and political parties (Veer et al., 2010).

Jackson and Darrow (2005) argue that celebrity endorsements also assist in making unpopular candidates more accepted among voters. The power of endorsement lies in the power of the group leader over the group members. Therefore, with endorsement, the organisations use the group leader to communicate the information to group members. Endorsement is particularly important when the group members do not know, or are not sure, what a particular political party stands for. In addition, Veer et al. (2010) argue that it may be costly for some people to acquire the information they desire to make a voting decision. These costs may include time, money and cognitive requirements that the voter might feel surpass the private benefits they could get by voting (Grossman & Helpman, 1999). In such instances, voters tend to look for readily available information to guide them in their voting decision-making process (Lupia, 1992). McKelvey and Ordeshook (1985) identified celebrity endorsement as a significant source of information that helps voters make informed decisions. According to Henneberg and Chen (2008), there are two broad types of celebrity political endorsers, namely, internal celebrities (celebrities within the political party) and traditional celebrities (e.g movie stars, athletes, influencers, media figures, media figures, entertainers and entrepreneurs).

3 HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Endorser credibility and political brand credibility

Celebrity credibility has an impact on how individuals respond to endorsement (Bennett, Malone, Cheatham, & Saligram, 2019; Morin, Ivory, & Tubbs, 2012). Ohanian (1990, p. 40) defines source credibility as a "term commonly used to imply a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of the message." The credibility model illustrates that the source credibility is mainly influenced by two factors—namely, expertise and trustworthiness (Morin et al., 2012). Moreover, one additional determinant of source credibility—attractiveness—has been identified by numerous scholars (Brann, Himes, & Leezer, 2010; Kamins, 1989; Kenton, 1989; McCrosky & Teven, 1999; Ohanian, 1990; Ohanian & Kertz, 1992).

La Ferle and Choi (2005) established that endorser credibility had a significant influence on consumers' attitudes and behaviour change. In addition, Costanzao and Goodnight (2005) maintain that endorsers with high credibility tend to be more persuasive compared to endorsers with low credibility. In the political context, it is suggested that endorser credibility significantly influences the political brand credibility. Therefore, political parties can build their own credibility through directing their efforts on being selective of the sources they use to convey information (Chou, 2015). Since celebrity endorsement, as a communication tool, will contain some of the signal of the endorsed political brand. In such circumstances, it can be assumed that the credibility of the endorser will thus transfer to the political brand (Hati, Gayatri, Lupiyoadi, & Safira, 2017). Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis is advanced.

*Hypothesis 1:.*The credibility of a celebrity endorser significantly and positively impacts the credibility of the endorsed political brand.

3.2 Endorser credibility and voting intentions

The role of credibility in persuading individuals' attitudes and intention has been debated by numerous researchers in a political marketing context (Prete, 2007; Yoon, Pinkleton, & Ko, 2005). Nonetheless, there is still a scarcity of studies examining celebrity credibility in influencing the voting intentions (Hati et al., 2017). A plethora of the prior studies have paid attention to political credibility in determining voting intention (Funk & Coker, 2016; Housholder & LaMarre, 2014; Swire, Berinsky, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2017).

Marketing and consumer behaviour studies have acknowledged the influence of endorser credibility on the effectiveness of advertising (Apejoye, 2017: Hati et al., 2017). Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) reveal that endorser credibility is the degree of confidence the audience has in the endorser's expertise and trustworthiness. Furthermore, Hati et al. (2017) found that endorser credibility is important in political marketing communication. McNair (2011) revealed that the image of the endorser has become significant in political campaigns. Mondak and Huckfeldt (2006) indicated that the credibility of endorsers tends to have a positive outcome in the elections. In addition, Hati et al. (2017) found that endorser credibility has a positive impact on voting intentions. Therefore, based on this background, we have hypothesised that:

Hypothesis 2:.Endorser credibility has a significant impact on voting intentions.

3.3 Political brand credibility and voting intentions

Consumers tend to easily accept communication from organisations with high credibility and reject communication from organisations that lack credibility (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). The significance of credibility in persuading attitudes and intention has been addressed by numerous scholars in a political communication context (Prete, 2007; Yoon et al., 2005). According to Funk and Coker (2016), Housholder and LaMarre (2014), and Swire et al. (2017), limited studies have examined the influence of political candidate and party credibility on voting intentions. Available studies found that the voter's intention to vote for a political party is strongly influenced by the political party's credibility (Hati et al., 2017; Maathuis, Rodenburg, & Sikkel, 2004). Therefore, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

*Hypothesis 3:.*Political brand credibility has a significant impact on voting intentions.

4 METHODOLOGY

Because the aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between endorser credibility, political brand credibility and voting intentions, the research strategy implemented was quantitative. The quantitative research design can be defined as techniques used to quantify data (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). According to Dludla and Dlamini (2018), a quantitative research approach typically involves statistical analyses.

4.1 Sample and data collection

This study employed a self-administered questionnaire to collect data. Data were collected from individuals eligible to vote in South Africa. Therefore, data were collected from South Africans with a green barcoded ID book, or smartcard ID, or valid Temporary Identity Certificate (TIC). All the participants were 18 years and above. A total of 227 completed questionnaires were obtained.

4.2 Measurement instrument and questionnaire design

Measurement scales were adopted from previous studies. The researchers selected scales that demonstrated high reliability and validity. Necessary modifications were implemented to ensure that the measurement scales fit the current study. Endorser credibility was measured, using an 11-item scale, adopted from La Ferle and Choi (2005). Furthermore, political brand credibility was measured, using a five-item scale, adopted from Baek, Kim, and Yu (2010). Lastly, voting intentions were measured using a four-item scale adopted from Pease and Brewer (2008). These three variables were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. The five-point Likert scale range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1 in the subsequent section.

4.3 Respondents profile

Table 1 depicts the profiles of the participants. The participants were requested to provide information regarding their demographic data, including gender, age, ethnic group and education level. The majority of the participants were males (59.91%). Just over 30% (32.59%) of the participants were female and 7.48% preferred not to reveal their gender. The majority of respondents (68.71%) were between 18 and 35 years old. Most of the respondents were black (78%), followed by coloured (21.15%), and 70.47 % of the respondents had a tertiary qualification.

5 DATA ANALYSES

The relationships in the proposed conceptual framework in Figure 1 were examined using the structural equation modelling (SEM) in SPSS 25 and smart partial least squares (smartPLS). Partial least squares-structural equation modelling has gained prominence as the next-level generation multivariate statistical technique for marketing research (Wong, 2016). According to Monecke, and Leisch (2012, p. 11) "SmartPLS is stand-alone software specialised for PLS path models and it is built on a Java Eclipse platform making its operating system independent". Subramaniama, Shamsudinb, and Alshuaibic (2017) argue that partial least square can be used to assess the structural model. The PLS-SEM approach is deemed suitable for this study for two reasons: firstly, the purpose of this study was oriented towards prediction of the dependent variables (Chin, 2010), and lastly, the latent variable scores were used in the subsequent analysis for predictive relevance. Furthermore, PLS-SEM is effective in analysing data using a small sample.

TABLE 1. Respondents profile

| Characteristics	Frequencies	%
Gender		
Male	136	59.91
Female	74	32.59
Prefer not to say	17	7.48
Total	**227**	**100%**
Age		
18–25	72	31.71
26–35	84	37
36–40	43	18.94
41–45	20	8.81
Above 45	8	3.52
Prefer not to say	0	
Total	**227**	**100%**
Ethnic group		
Black African	179	78.85
Asian	0	
White	0	
Coloured	48	21.15
Prefer not to say	0	
Total	**227**	**100%**
Education level		
Doctor of Philosophy Degree	0	0
Master's Degree	6	2.64
Honours/Postgraduate Diploma	19	8.37
Bachelor/Advance diploma	53	23.34
Diploma/No Diploma	82	36.12
High school	54	23.78
Primary school	0	0
Prefer not to say	13	5.72
Total	**227**	**100%**

Source: Authors' own compilation.
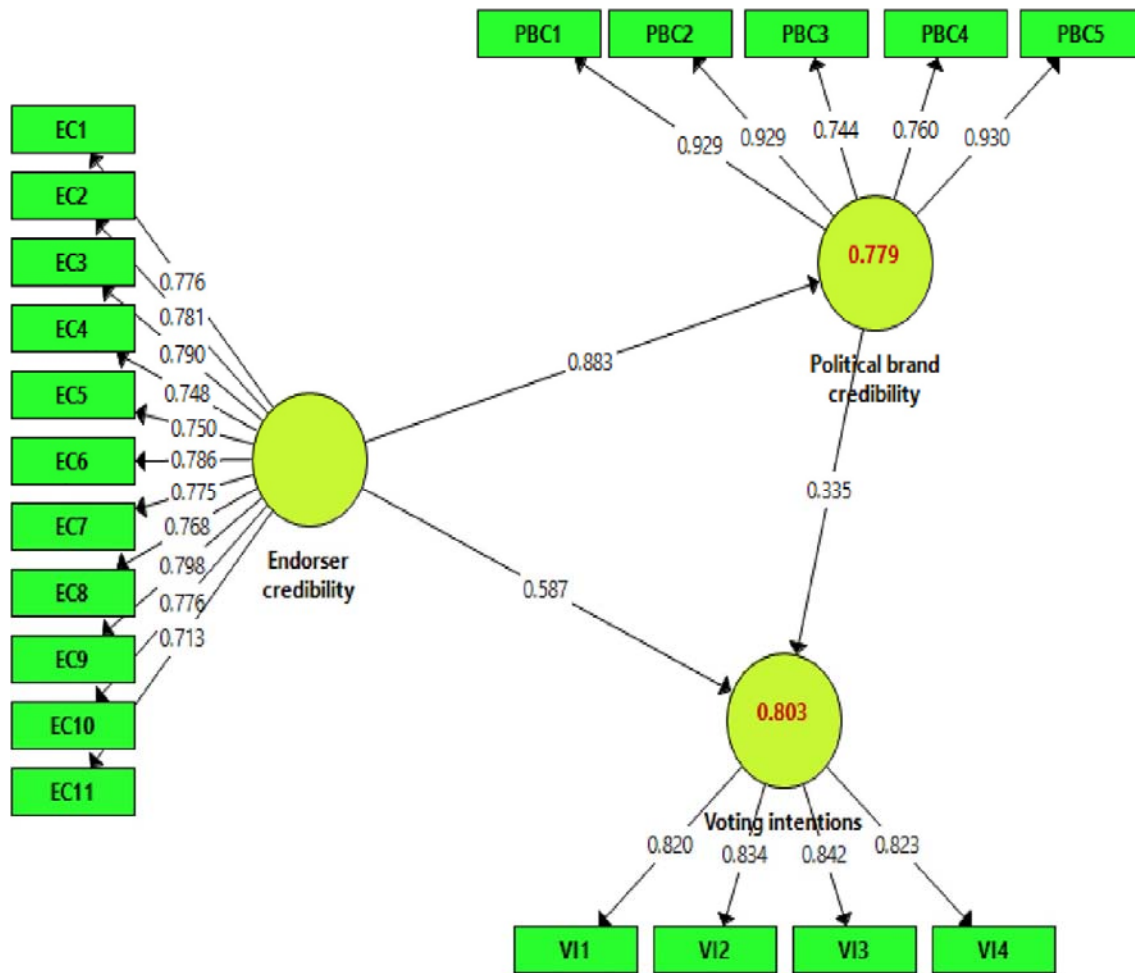
FIGURE 1. Measurement and structural model

5.1 Reliability analysis

The investigators checked the measurement scales' reliability and validity. Iacobucci and Churchill (2010, p. 258) define reliability as "the similarity of results provided by the independent but comparable measures of the same object or construct, or an index of consistence". To test the reliability of this study, the researchers used composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) argue that a CR index over 0.7 indicates internal consistency of a construct. All the CR values for this study exceeded the recommended minimum. The CR values varied between 0.898 and 0.941 (Table 2), while the α values varied from .849 to .931 (as illustrated in Table 2). All the alpha values exceed .6, as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). According to Chinomona (2011), a high level of Cronbach's alpha coefficient demonstrate higher reliability of the measurement scale.

TABLE 2. Scale accuracy analysis

Research constructs								
PLS codes	**PLS code items**	**Mean values**	**SD values**	**Item to total correlation values**	**α value**	**CR**	**AVE**	**Factor loading**
EC	EC1	4.58	1.212	0.730	.931	0.941	0.592	0.776
	EC2	4.67	1.185	0.639				0.781
	EC3	4.11	1.316	0.648				0.790
	EC4	3.79	1.964	0.641				0.748
	EC5	3.90	1.142	0.602				0.750
	EC6	3.75	1.255	0.658				0.786
	EC7	4.87	1.335	0.649				0.775
	EC8	4.79	1.374	0.553				0.768
	EC9	3.59	1.377	0.658				0.798
	EC10	4.27	1.927	0.650				0.776
	EC11	3.38	1.411	0.663				0.713
PBC	PBC1	4.88	1.501	0.667	.911	0.935	0.745	0.929
	PBC2	4.85	1.978	0.695				0.929
	PBC3	3.98	1.358	0.639				0.744
	PBC4	4.07	1.971	0.621				0.760
	PBC5	3.78	1.177	0.594				0.930
VI	VI1	4.58	1.366	0.681	.849	0.898	0.689	0.820
	VI2	4.12	1.781	0.699				0.834
	VI3	4.86	1.647	0.673				0.842
	VI4	4.08	1.884	0.699				0.823

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability; EC, endorser credibility; PBC, political brand credibility; SD, standard deviation; VI, voting intentions.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Moreover, convergent validity was tested by employing item or factor loadings of above 0.5—according to the corresponding variables (Chinomona, 2013)—while discriminant validity was measured using average variance extracted (AVE) to ensure that there is no multiple collinearity problem between all the measures and inter-construct correlation matrix. All the AVE values exceed 0.50, ranging from 0.592 to 0.745, confirming discriminant validity (Table 2). The researchers analysed the inter-construct correlation matrix to assess the discriminant validity of the measurement instrument. According to Chinomona (2013), correlations that are less than 1 demonstrate discriminant validity. The lower the correlation between the variables, the higher the validity. All the inter-construct values were below the recommended 0.6 (Table 3), signifying higher discriminant validity.

TABLE 3. Results of discriminant validity analysis

VARIABLES	EC	PBC	VI
EC	1.000	—	—
PBC	0.357	1.000	—
VI	0.582	0.443	1.000

Abbreviations: EC, endorser credibility; PBC, political brand credibility; VI, voting intentions.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

The item to total statistics for each item was analysed to assess convergent validity. Morar, Venter, and Chuchu (2015) indicate that the item to total correlation values should exceed .5. As seen in Table 2, all the items to total correlation values are above the threshold of 0.5. The results obtained from reliability and validity examinations are presented in Table 2. Factor loadings were also computed to ensure that there is convergent validity. As is depicted in Table 2, each of the three corresponding variables, namely endorser celebrity, political party credibility and voting intention's factor loadings varied from 0.713 to 0.930, which exceeded the acceptable benchmark of 0.5. As shown in Table 2, all the items have loadings greater than 0.5, indicating that they explain at least 50% of what they are anticipated to measure (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

According to the scale accuracy analysis table presented below (Table 2), the mean value for all the measurement items ranges between 3 and 4, revealing that the majority of the participants had either a neutral standpoint (3 on the Likert scale) or they agreed (4 on the Likert scale) with the statements provided on the self-administered questionnaires. The standard deviation indicates the extent to which the participants deviated from the mean. Standard deviation should be less than 1 but is suggested to at least contain a value of less than 2 to guarantee that there is no issue of outliers (Drost, 2011). As outlined in Table 2, all the constructs had standard deviation that was below 2, ranging from 1.177 to 1.978.

5.2 Assessment of the structural research model with tests of hypotheses

Structural modelling was conducted to evaluate the cause–effect relationships among latent variables. The PLS depicts the results for the structural model and the item loadings for the variables examined in this study.

5.3 Assessment of the goodness of fit (GoF)

Overall, R^2 for political brand credibility and voting intentions in Figure 1 indicate that the research model explains 77.9 and 80.3%, respectively, of the variance in the endogenous variables. To calculate the global goodness-of-fit (GoF) statistic, a formula provided by Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, and Lauro (2005) was used as indicated in the equation:

$$\text{Goodness of Fit} = \sqrt[2]{\left(\text{average of all AVEs values} * \text{average of all R}^2\right)}$$
$$= 2\sqrt{0.675 * 0.527} = 0.59,$$

where AVE represents the average of all AVE values for the research variables, while R^2 represents the average of all R^2 values in the full path model.

The calculated global GoF is 0.59, which exceeds the threshold of GoF > 0.36 suggested by Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, and Van Oppen (2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that the research model has a good overall fit.

5.4 Path model results and factor loadings

The PLS estimation results for the structural model and the item loadings for the research constructs are shown in Figure 1. The findings of the structural model are displayed in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Results of structural equation model analysis

Hypothesis	Causal path	Path coefficients (β)	T-statistics	Decision
H_1	EC→PBC	0.883	11.464	Positive and significant
H_2	EC→VI	0.587	7.369	Positive and significant
H_3	PBC→VI	0.335	4.707	Positive and significant

Note: Arrows signify the relationships between each construct to indicate the proposed hypothesis.

Abbreviations: EC, endorser credibility; PBC, political brand credibility; VI, voting intentions.

Source: Authors' own compilation.

5.5 Hypotheses testing

The hypothesis was tested using path coefficient values, as well as the t-values for the structural model obtained from bootstrapping algorithm. The results of the hypothesis testing for this study have been presented in Table 4. The table presents the hypothesis, the relationships between the variables, path coefficients, t-statistics and the decision of whether their hypothesis was positive or negative. According to Beneke and Blampied (2012), t-values indicate whether a significant relationship exists between variables in the model and path coefficients, demonstrating the strength of the relationships in the model. Table 4 shows the standardised path coefficients and their corresponding t-values. A statistically significant relationship is expected to have a t-value that exceeds 1.96 at a 5% level of significance (Chin, 1998). Chinomona, Lin, Wang, and Cheng (2010) indicate that higher path coefficients demonstrated strong relationships among the variables. Table 4 shows the standardised path coefficient and t-value.

As shown in Table 4, the results of the structural equation modelling (SEM) indicate that the hypotheses proposed were supported by the data. According to the results, the relationship between the endorser credibility and political brand credibility (β = .833, t = 11.464) is positive and significant. This finding suggests that using an endorser that has credibility can assist an organisation to build its own credibility. The use of celebrities with credibility is an effective strategy to bring meaning to the brand (McCracken, 1989). When credible celebrities feature in the political campaign, it ensures that the campaign becomes more attractive, attention-grabbing and influential (Singh & Banerjee, 2018). When individuals consider the celebrity to have credible features, they believe that any organisation they associate themselves with has credible features as well. These findings coincide with the works of Nelson and Deborah (2017) who established that celebrity endorsement influences brand credibility. Furthermore, the relationship between endorser credibility and voters' intentions (β = .587, t = 7.369) is positive and significant. Credibility can be effective in driving voter intention. This finding is similar to the work of Garthwaite and Moore (2013),

who studied the influence of celebrity endorsement on political endorsement. Their study established that Oprah Winfrey is a credible celebrity in the United States of America, and as a result, her credibility has influenced voters' intentions to vote for Barack Obama during the 2008 democratic presidential elections. Lastly, the relationship between the political brand credibility and voters' intentions (β = 0.335, t = 4.707) is positive and significant. This finding suggests that political brand credibility drives voters' intention. Political parties with credibility tend to be trustworthy to voters. Accordingly, Wittman (2009) argues that voters, who are not well-informed about the party's underlying ideologies and policies, tend to rely on the party's credibility.

6 PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

This study provides important insights for political parties and political campaign managers who are considering using celebrity advocates to endorse their political parties and secure votes. The results show that celebrity endorsements can be effective in driving voter intention. The role of political campaign managers is to conduct research in order to understand the needs and desires of the general public, and then use that information to shape a political offering that will relate to the needs of these voters. Furthermore, such information assists campaign managers to make informed communication decisions to achieve their political objectives and select the best endorsers for their campaigns. Therefore, such insights may also be useful in achieving political campaign efficiency and assist managers in adjusting their communication strategy to appeal to voters.

Credibility has been acknowledged as an important aspect of all types of communication—particularly in political campaigning—as the communication process tends to contain risks and indecision. Therefore, the credibility of the endorser is significant in the campaign process. Traditionally, the selection of a celebrity endorser was easy as brands and political parties merely needed to review different media outlets to determine the most popular celebrities. They would then shortlist these celebrities and negotiate deals with their managers. Companies would also use the Q-score method to evaluate the potential value a celebrity may have on the organisation. This, however, is not sufficient in the political marketing context. Consumers might be more influenced to buy a product when it has been endorsed by a person they like. However, voters want recommendations from people with some credibility. This suggests that political parties should be deliberate when selecting a celebrity endorser, as they tend to spend a significant portion of their communication budget on celebrity endorsers.

The study also found that political brand credibility influences voters' intentions. Therefore, political parties should invest time and money in building brand credibility by directing their attention to the quality of information transferred through their marketing communication strategies. Political parties should also consistently communicate with voters. Parties that communicate with the public only when they campaign are regarded as untrustworthy. Furthermore, it is believed that a realistic and authentic political party sticks to its values. A brand that diverges from its values is considered dishonest. In addition, transparency is important in building brand credibility. Political parties should also consider selecting candidates who have credibility because untrustworthy candidates destroy the reputation

of the political party. Political brand credibility can be built when the party consistently delivers service to the public.

7 LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is subject to some limitations. This study was conducted in a geographically constrained area of South Africa and a true picture of the number of total eligible voters would entail a far larger investigation across the country, as well as across age groups, education levels and gender. Future studies should examine the influence of political celebrity endorsement on younger voters in developing economies, particularly countries in Africa. Loader, Vromen, and Xenos (2016) maintain that celebrities may be exceptionally helpful when it comes to appealing to young citizens—especially in a culture familiar to them and that they consider to be theirs (Austin et al., 2008). Consequently, young people (like university and college students) may be a cohort of voters to whom celebrity endorsements are most relevant (Payne, Hanlon, & Twomey, 2007). Future research could also examine personal characteristics—such as political knowledge, interest and involvement—as moderating variables. Furthermore, researchers might find it fruitful to examine the impact of celebrity endorsement on their own voting intentions.

Biographies

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