

## INFLUENCE OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF EKITI STATE RESIDENTS IN EKITI STATE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN 2022

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### ABSTRACT

*Endorsement from celebrities is gradually gaining ground for awareness creation and to influence voting behaviour during electioneering campaign. This study aims to examine the influence of celebrity endorsement on voting behaviour of Ekiti state residents during 2022 Ekiti state gubernatorial elections. The study was anchored on Source Credibility Theory. With a sample size of 208 and a descriptive survey design, the study found that the major factor that attracted Ekiti resident to vote was civic responsibility, followed by the candidate's preference. Other factors that influence voting behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Governorship election include, monarchs, clergy and family heads. The study concluded that celebrities' endorsement alone does not necessarily influence electorates to vote for political candidates. The study recommends that selection of credible candidates should be the focus of Political Party leaders before bringing on board any celebrity to endorse their candidates.*

**Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Voting behaviour, gubernatorial elections, Ekiti State, Influence.**

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, after about two-decades-long military rule, coincided with the time the country's film industries were burgeoning with a fan culture gaining ground. There are arguably two distinct cinemas in Nigeria. Nollywood films in the south while Kannywood, domiciled in the north. Celebrities from these film industries have been engaged in campaigns on and off social media for politicians seeking positions at both local and national levels. Their involvement reached a crescendo in the 2019 Nigerian general elections. More and more celebrities were seen on the campaign trail around the country in the build-up to the election (Abdurrahaman, et al. 2021).

Interestingly, the use of celebrities in the endorsement of candidates for political office is gradually becoming a norm within the political space and elections system globally (Mishra & Mishra, 2014; Chou, 2015; von Sikorski et al., 2018; Agina & Ekwevugbe, 2017). Political candidates and parties expend financial resources on celebrities for endorsement, but it remains unclear how celebrity endorsed advertisement influence voters' intention. In Nigeria, there is evidence in television commercials, billboard, newspaper and online adverts of Nollywood actors/ actress' online influencers and musicians endorsing candidates.

Endorsement of a brand, product, image, or person is critical in shaping customer perception. Brand endorsement encourages consumers to buy a product and increases patronage (Buttle, Raymond, & Danziger, 2000). Thus, a brand development effort comprises of brand endorsement by a well-known and famous public figure in order to boost customer perception of the brand marketed or supported by the celebrity.

Agina and Ekwevugbe (2017) noted that traditionally, marketing campaigns used celebrities because the public views them as sources for lifestyle choices and cultural meanings. This suggests that celebrities are largely emulated and their promotion of a cause would receive attention and influence opinions. Thus celebrity endorsement of politicians increases the exposure of the politicians to the public, and can also improve the involvement of voters in the election process. In the same way advertisers (political advertisers) use film, television, music or sports celebrities to promote their brands because consumers identify with success stories, and are led to thinking that the successes of the celebrities are transferred to the product or service advertised.

Atkin and Block (1983) cited in Agina and Ekwevugbe (2017) noted that a source which is considered highly credible will most likely be more convincing than low credible sources. Source credibility and celebrity endorsement are related concepts which advance our understanding of persuasive communication. McCracken (1989) cited by Agina and Ekwevugbe (2017) sees celebrity endorsement as any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement. Such a definition is limiting as it ignores the growing political celebrity endorsements taking place around the globe. It also subtly initiates the debates around the validity of political celebrity endorsements. Whereas some authors (Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Garthwaite & Moore, 2008) postulate that celebrity involvement in promoting politicians causes opens doors to favourable election outcomes, others (Erdogan, 1999; West & Orman, 2002; Wood & Herbst, 2007) express doubts as to whether film and music stars are sufficiently informed about political matters to influence voting behaviour.

To illustrate the power of celebrity in endorsing political causes, Garthwaite and Moore (2008) cited in Abina, & Babatunde (2020) found that a celebrity endorsement featuring Oprah garnered approximately 1,015,559 votes for one of the Democratic candidates in the 2008 primaries, with the winner outnumbering the first runner-up by an estimated figure of 278,966 votes. Accordingly, there was little question that fame has a significant impact on the acceptance, retention, and favourability of the related product, as well as in the case of politics.

Although Studies on celebrity endorsement are conducted from different perspectives (Anudeep & Anuj, 2015; Temperley & Tangen, 2006; Zafar & Rafique, 2015). However, studies of celebrity endorsement on politics and officeholders have a very little proportion. Also Olaopa (2022) noted that Nigeria has derailed from issue based politics and is now focused on using celebrity and hate speech to get votes. The elections in Ekiti state is one of the off season elections in Nigeria hence has become pivotal to the general elections since it comes up few months to the general elections. Hence this study seek to examine the influence of

celebrity endorsement on voting behaviour of Ekiti state residents in Ekiti state gubernatorial election in 2022

### **Research objectives**

1. To determine the level of awareness of voters on usage of celebrities as political endorsement strategy in Ekiti 2022 Gubernatorial election.
2. To know the electorate perception on the use of celebrities as endorsers during the Ekiti 2022 Gubernatorial election.
3. To know the influence of celebrities endorsement strategy on voters' voting decisions in Ekiti Gubernatorial election.

### **Literature review**

Friedman and Friedman (1979) defined celebrity as "an individual who is known to the public (actor, sports figure, entertainer, etc.) for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed". Among others, the Nigeria based Telecommunication Company, Globacom leads in engaging celebrities as its brand ambassadors. The market is still tough. Oyeniyi (2014, p. 41) alludes that "the difficulty arose from the increasing number of new and competing products in the market with primetime television cluster becoming almost a quarter of promotional content."

A celebrity endorsement is when a famous person (A celebrity) uses their fame or social status to help promote a product, service, or brand. Celebrity endorsements can be incredibly effective because they tap into the aspirational qualities that people often associate with celebrities (Abina, & Babatunde 2020).

A celebrity endorsement is defined as a type of advertising that employs well-known personalities or celebrities who are highly recognized, trusted, respected, or popular among the general public. Such individuals advertise for a company by using their names and pictures to promote a product or service. Brands believe that such approval from a celebrity might persuade target audiences to purchase their products ().

Celebrity endorsement has been proven to be one of the effective tools in the hands of marketers (Anjum, Dhanda, & Nagra, 2012), public and political office seekers (Brubakar, 2011; Wang & Luo, 2017) as it positions brand and makes it stand out by enhancing the image of the brand and in turn affects the consumers' perception and commitment (Gbadeyan, Abina, & Sowole, 2016). It also assists in aiding consumer recall and smoothening the progress of instant brand awareness in gaining the audience favour and attention (Katayal, 2007; Rain, 2010) and has a huge association with the brand in play. Celebrity endorsement has become a strong tool as it strengthens the attention given to a brand (Buttle et al., 2000) also influences consumers' perception, increases the brand's reputation (Erdogan, 1999) and help create differentiation in the market place (Roll, 2006). This is often adopted in the political realm in order to win the masses sympathy and affections (Brubakar, 2011), and for the celebrity to have even gained the publicity, affection and love of the targeted audience (Garthwaite & Moore, 2008), they (celebrity) would have previously engaged in a number of causes or activities (social responsibilities sometimes) and has developed into a paradigm for

celebrities aiming at gaining a good relationship with the public or gaining public acceptance (Smillie, 1998)

### **Empirical review**

A study by Abina, & Babatunde (2020) conducted in the Nigerian political environment examined the relationship between celebrity attractiveness and voters' acceptability and perception. The findings of this study suggest that celebrity attractiveness does not have a significant impact on voters' acceptability, but it does have a significant effect on voters' perception

Similarly, in a study by Ojekwe, (2017) on how political advertisements affect voters' behaviour in the Lagos State 2015 Gubernatorial election, findings reveal that celebrity endorsement of candidates do not influence the outcome of the election, but have a high recall level among voters.

Abdurrahman et al. (2021) did a study titled "Assessing the effects of Celebrity Endorsements of Political Parties: An empirical study of Nigerian 2019 Presidential Elections". The study examined the impact of celebrity endorsement on Political Parties and its influence on electorates to vote for a particular Party's candidate. The mediating role of Political Brand Credibility (PBC) and Political Brand Equity (PBE) towards Voting Intention (VI) relationships were also examined. The study's conceptual framework was developed using The Source Credibility, The Associative Network Memory Model, and the Brand Signalling Theory. The study utilized survey. Findings by Abdurrahman et al. (2021) suggested that Endorser Credibility has a direct positive significant relationship with Political Brand Credibility. However, there is no significant direct correlation between Endorser Credibility and Political Brand Equity and Voting Intention. Nevertheless, indirect relationship was established. Findings from the study has proven that the endorsement of celebrities alone does not necessarily influence electorates to vote for political candidates, rather the Credibility of the Party and its Equity play a pivotal role with regards to the Voting Intention of voters. Practically, this study has given us insights into the endorsement of celebrities of political candidates, which the Political Party leaders should consider before bringing on board any celebrity to endorse their candidates.

Agina & Ekwevugbe (2017) studied titled "Celebrity endorsement of political aspirants and its effects on college students in Lagos". This article examines two main research questions: what factors justify celebrity endorsement as an election campaign strategy given the increasing doubts associated with celebrity involvement in politics? Did celebrity endorsement of political aspirants influence young adults' voting behaviour during the 2015 elections in Lagos? Using mixed method approaches, and supported by source credibility and celebrity endorsement debates, a survey was conducted with a sample of 375 students of the Yaba College of Technology. Three semi-structured interviews with members of successful campaign teams were also conducted. Our findings revealed that campaign managers have huge confidence in the celebrity endorsement strategy for several reasons and would employ the approach in future. Further, the young people interrogated revealed that two-thirds of them are fans of Nollywood stars and music icons. But they were not influenced to vote on the basis of the celebrities' say-so. These findings are somewhat consistent with extant

literature, but suggest the need for further studies regarding how celebrities translate fandom to votes.

## **Theoretical review**

### **Source credibility**

The source credibility model refers to a theoretical framework used to analyse and understand the factors that contribute to the perceived credibility of a source or communicator. It explores how certain characteristics and attributes of a source influence the receiver's acceptance and evaluation of the message being communicated.

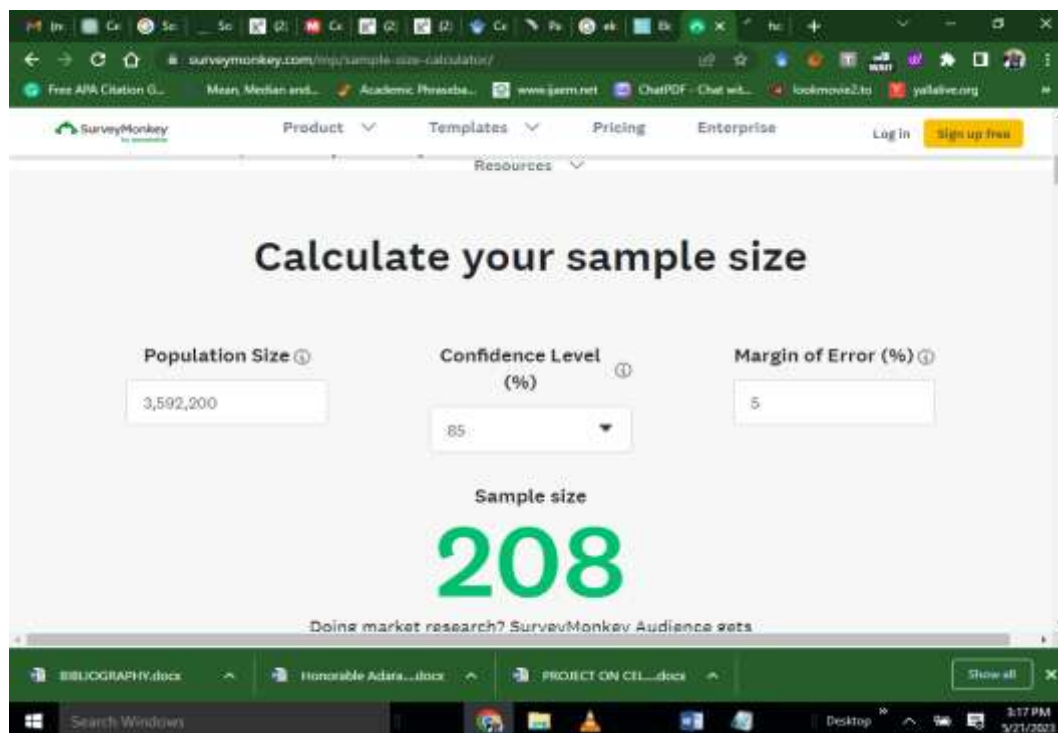
The source credibility model (Hovland & Weiss, 1952) is one of the communication strategy models proposed in marketing research. The theory postulates that the credibility of endorsers could influence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of receivers toward the endorsed objects. Kelman's source characteristics identify three characteristics of successful marketing communications sources: source credibility. Source attractiveness. Source power.

Source credibility model is about the conviction and believe the audience has in an advertisement. Therefore, the central thesis of the source credibility theory explains that the acceptance of a product or service being advertised depends on how the audience perceives the source of the message based on the expertise, trustworthiness and his knowledge (Bergkvist, Hjalmarson & Mägi, 2016; Abdurrahman et al. 2021).

### **Methodology**

The researcher used survey research design while questionnaire was used to collect information from the respondents. The data were also presented in the research utilising descriptive statistics and SPSS 23 was used for data analysis. The population of this study consists of residents of Ekiti state within voting age as at 2023 and who participated in the 2023 elections. The population of Ekiti state as of march 2022 is 3,592,200 with an annual projection growth of 2.6% (City Population, 2022).

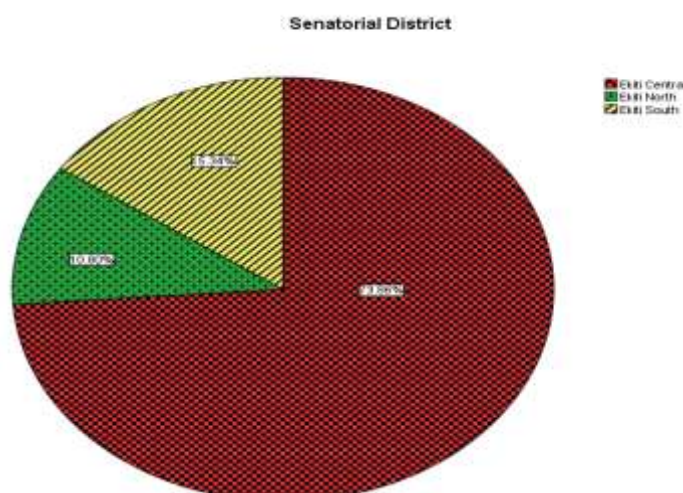
Using the survey monkey online calculator at the confidence level of 85% and 5% margin of error the study sample is 208.



Although 208 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to males students using the purposive sampling through online distribution only 176 were retrieved and found useful for the analysis.

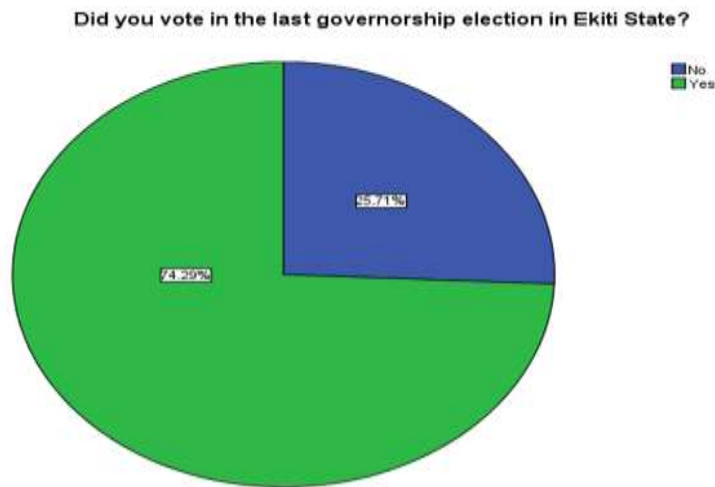
### Data presentation

Fig 1. Respondent's Senatorial district



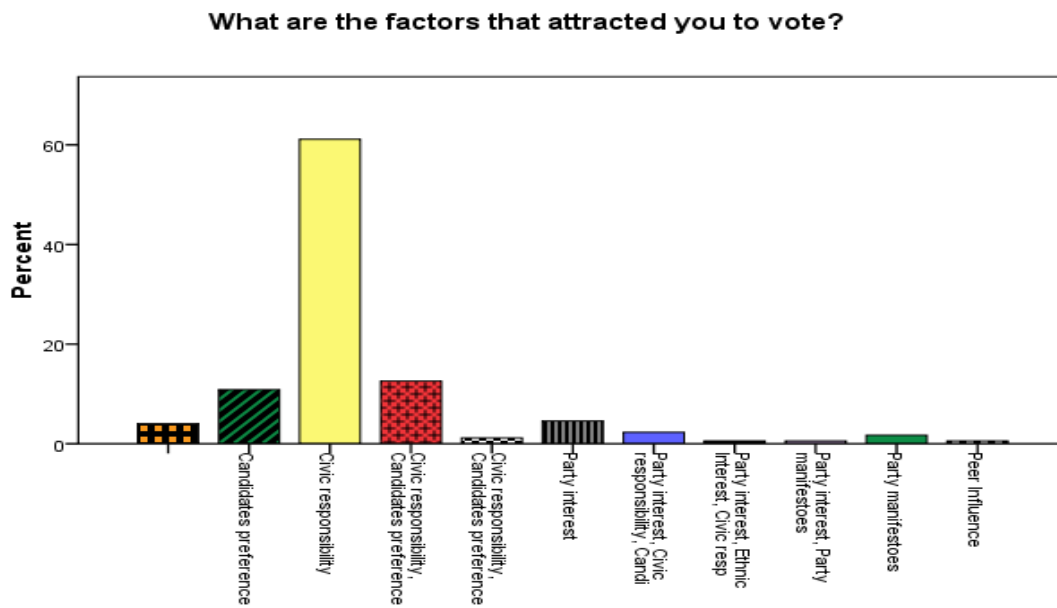
Analysis of data from Fig. 1 revealed that Ekiti central constituted the majority with 130(73.9%).

**Fig 2. Did you vote in the last governorship election in Ekiti State?**



Analysis of data from Fig. 2 revealed that 74.29% of the respondents actually voted in the last governorship election in Ekiti state.

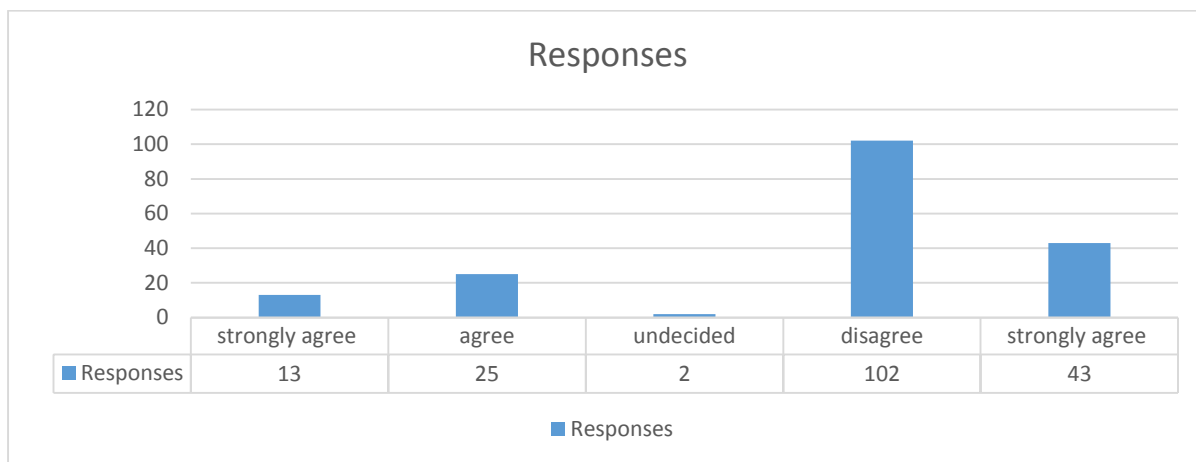
**Figure 3 what are the factors that attracted you to vote?**



**What are the factors that attracted you to vote?**

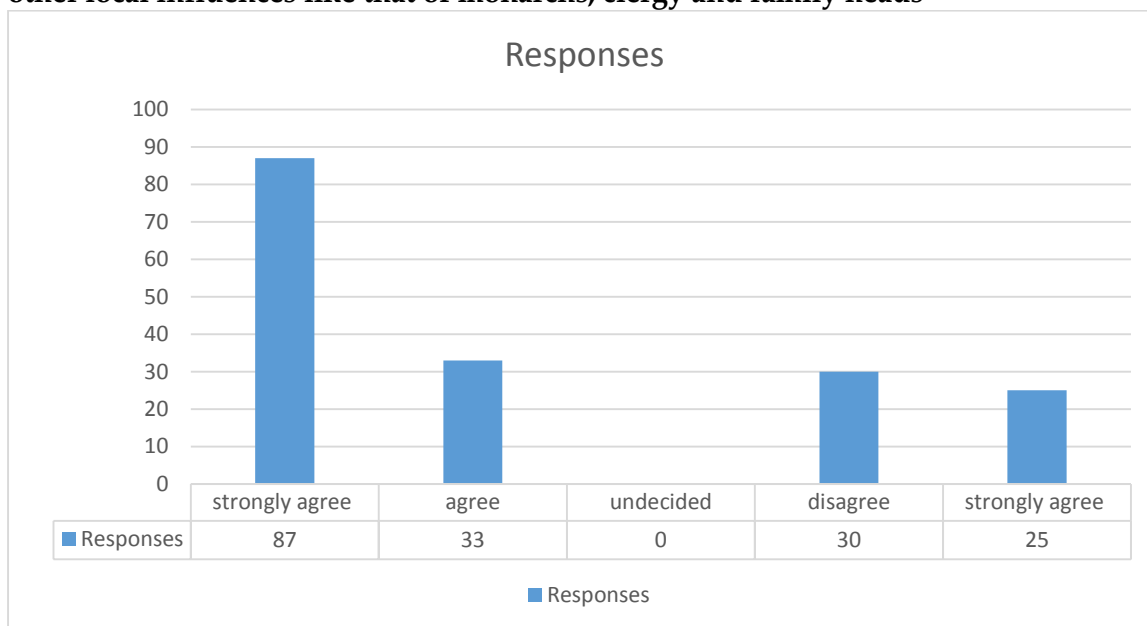
The figure 3 above showed majority of the respondents (61.1%) said the major factor that attracted them to vote was civic responsibility, followed by 10.9% who said candidate's preference.

**Figure 4: Voters behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Governorship election was influenced by celebrities**



Analysis from Fig 4 shows that majority 102(58.3%) of the respondents said their voting behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Governorship election was not influenced by celebrities, similarly 43 (24.6%) strongly disagreed that they were influenced by celebrities in their Voting behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Governorship election.

**Figure 5: Voters behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Gubernatorial election was based on other local influences like that of monarchs, clergy and family heads**



Analysis from figure 5 show that majority 87(49.7%) of the respondents said their voting behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Gubernatorial election was based on other local influence like that of monarchs, clergy and family heads.



### **Discussion of findings**

Based on the finding of this study the major factor that attracted Ekiti resident to vote was civic responsibility, followed by the candidate's preference. This finding corroborates the statement of Peterside (2023) who averred that voting is an opportunity to choose between different options, not only of candidates but also what they represent versus what people want. It should not be about religion, region, ethnicity, and party but about the future of our country.

Another finding revealed that voter's behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Governorship election was not influenced by celebrities. This finding is in consonance with what Abdurrahman et al. (2021) found that the endorsement of celebrities alone does not necessarily influence electorates to vote for political candidates, rather the Credibility of the Party and its Equity play a pivotal role with regards to the Voting Intention of voters. Practically, this study has given us insights into the endorsement of celebrities of political candidates, which the Political Party leaders should consider before bringing on board any celebrity to endorse their candidates.

Findings showed that voter's behaviour during the 2022 Ekiti Gubernatorial election was based on other local influence like that of monarchs, clergy and family heads. This does not correlate with a study by Abina&Babatunde (2020) who found out that celebrity attractiveness have a significant impact on voter's acceptability. Thus this present study supports that local leaders who command moral authority, control resources, can influence the electoral behaviour of their dependents.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study investigated influence of celebrity endorsement on voting behaviour of Ekiti state residents in Ekiti state gubernatorial election in 2022. The study concluded that the endorsement of celebrities alone does not necessarily influence electorates to vote for political candidates, rather the Credibility of the Party. Practically, this study has given us insights into the endorsement of celebrities of political candidates, which the Political Party leaders should consider before bringing on board any celebrity to endorse their candidates. The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to the political parties to focus and invest more effort, resources, and energy in branding their parties with meaningful manifestos that would touch the lives of the electorates and in doing this they should not forget the influence of the critical stakeholders in the communities like the monarchs, family heads and their religious heads because Ekiti people have strong attachment and respect with and for their religion leaders.

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