

Celebrity Political Endorsement and Young Voters in Europe: A Five-Country Comparison on Celebrity Support Effectiveness in the European Elections

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Celebrity political endorsement is an internationally common phenomenon that has substantially increased over recent years. It refers to celebrities who publicly support political candidates or parties, often in election campaigns. Because most studies focus on the United States, little is known about the effects of celebrity political endorsement in Europe. Our study aims to contribute to the European perspective by testing the effectiveness of such endorsements in the context of the 2014 European parliamentary elections. We conducted online experiments in five European countries—Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Spain, and Sweden—to measure effects of celebrity endorsements on attitudes toward the EU and on vote intention. Endorser attributes (political expertise, trustworthiness, and likability) and characteristics of the respondents (political interest and gender) were included as moderating variables. Our results show only a few statistically significant effects, which are furthermore inconsistent with the theoretical assumptions. Given that celebrity political endorsement does not elicit the assumed effects in European countries, we discuss possible explanations for our results.

Keywords: celebrity political endorsement, European parliamentary elections, media effects, political attitudes, vote intention, comparative online-experiment

Celebrity endorsement in election campaigns has a long-standing history in the United States, but especially gained popularity in the presidential campaigns of 2012 and 2016, when Hollywood stars such as Angelina Jolie, singers such as Katy Perry, and talk show host Oprah Winfrey campaigned for presidential candidates. Also in other countries across the globe, celebrities have supported candidates and parties in election campaigns—for example, in the 2015 British election (fashion designer Vivienne Westwood,

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Date submitted: 2018–12–06

¹ We thank Michael Karlsson (Karlstad University), Andrea Esser (University of Roehampton), Ivan Lacasa (Universitat Internacional de Catalunya), and Dorota Piontek (AMU Poznan) for contributing to the project.

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comedian Russell Brand), in India's 2014 election (Bollywood stars Shah Rukh Khan and Amitabh Bachchan), and in the 2014 Brazilian election (soccer player Neymar and model Naomi Campbell).

Such highly visible election support also attracts the attention of political communication scholars. Although the majority of studies stem from the United States (e.g., Austin, Van de Vord, Pinkleton, & Epstein, 2008; Brubaker, 2011; Garthwaite & Moore, 2013; Nownes, 2012; Pease & Brewer, 2008), research activities also relate to other countries around the world—for example, Canada (Jackson & Darrow, 2005), Germany (Friedrich & Steinleitner, 2015; Schoen & Faas, 2009), Great Britain (Veer, Becirovic, & Martin, 2010), India (Mishra & Mishra, 2014), Nigeria (Agina & Ekwevugbe, 2017), and Taiwan (Chou, 2015). Still, empirical evidence is limited and inconsistent, especially when it comes to European countries. The inconsistent findings raise the question of whether celebrity endorsement effects are culture-bound and thus should only be carefully transferred from one nation to another. So far, cultural and political differences only play a minor role in the academic debate on celebrity political endorsement, and comparative studies that could shed light on international differences do not exist. The present study aims to contribute to the European perspective by testing the effectiveness of celebrity political endorsement in Europe. In the context of the 2014 European parliamentary elections, we conducted online experiments in five countries: Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. The European parliamentary elections are well suited for testing celebrity political endorsement. First, they are European-wide elections, which allows scholars to run comparative experiments simultaneously in multiple countries. Second, they are low-involvement elections, with interest in campaigns and voter turnout being traditionally lower than in national elections (European Parliament, 2014). The prevalent lack of interest should facilitate the potential of celebrity endorsement effects (see Veer et al., 2010).

The 2014 elections took place in a time of crisis for the European Union. National governments and the European Commission were still battling the European sovereign debt crisis; public support for the EU was at a low point. Overall trust in the EU had slumped from 57% in 2007 to as low as 31% in 2014 (Eurobarometer 81, 2014). It was in this climate that the eighth parliamentary elections were held. About 380 million citizens across the EU's 28 member states were eligible to vote. The overall turnout rate was 42.6%, whereas national turnout varied quite substantially (e.g., 48.1% in Germany, 35.6% in Great Britain, and 23.8% in Poland). Furthermore, Eurosceptic parties were quite successful in several of the EU member states. The pan-national association of Eurosceptic parties—the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)—became the third largest group, with 9.3% of overall votes (European Parliament, 2014). Given this context of low voter turnout, little public interest in the elections, and the success of Eurosceptic parties, it is of special interest whether celebrity political endorsement might help to increase voter turnout and to improve the EU's predominantly negative image at that time.

Effects of Celebrity Political Endorsement

The basic idea behind celebrity political endorsement is that stars may use their popularity to promote political candidates, parties, or issues. So far, scholars investigate five types of celebrity endorsement: get-out-the-vote campaigns (1), celebrity support for political candidates (2) and parties (3), celebrity advocacy for political issues (4), and celebrity politicians (5). Research activities on endorsement effects usually concentrate on celebrity support for political candidates. Effects of the other endorsement

types have only rarely been analyzed. In the case of celebrity politicians—that is, when celebrities run for political office themselves (e.g., Brown, 2013; Kellner, 2010; Street, 2012; Wheeler, 2013)—effects studies have not yet been published to our knowledge. A closer look at the existing effects studies reveals the variety of research activities and findings in this field.

Effects of get-out-the-vote campaigns (1). Only few studies investigate celebrity participation in campaigns to increase voter turnout (Austin et al., 2008; Schoen & Faas, 2009). In these campaigns, celebrities do not support a specific candidate or party, but emphasize the importance of going to the ballots in general. Whereas Austin and colleagues (2008) found positive effects of a get-out-the-vote campaign on young voters' participation in the 2004 U.S. election, a German-based study in the context of the 2009 European election (Schoen & Faas, 2009) did not reveal mobilizing endorsement effects on voter turnout. The inconsistent findings might be explained by the sample structures. While Austin and colleagues (2008) conducted their experiment with college students, Schoen and Faas (2009) used a convenience sample with no further information on demographics given. It is likely that celebrity political endorsement is more effective with younger voters because they relate to a stronger extent to pop culture and celebrities than do older generations. This assumption is supported by Austin and colleagues (2008), who identified respondents' age and political experience to be important moderating factors.

Effects of celebrity support for political candidates (2). By far the largest number of studies analyzes effects of celebrity endorsement for individual candidates. The empirical evidence of these studies is rather mixed. Positive effects on personal vote intentions for candidates could be found in Taiwan (Chou, 2015), Canada (Jackson & Darrow, 2005), and the United States (Pease & Brewer, 2008). However, a candidate's image does not necessarily benefit from celebrity-endorsed promotions (Pease & Brewer, 2008), and celebrity support can even deteriorate the public image (Friedrich & Steinleitner, 2015). Concerning viability assessments, several studies found a third-person effect of celebrity support for candidates, with voters overestimating the impact of celebrity political endorsements on others while underestimating effects on themselves (e.g., Agina & Ekwevugbe, 2017; Brubaker, 2011; Pease & Brewer, 2008). Emotional effects of celebrity political endorsement were investigated by Nownes (2017), who showed that celebrity support for Hillary Clinton during the 2016 campaign decreased negative emotions toward her.

Impact of party-centered celebrity endorsement (3). In Great Britain, Veer et al. (2010) found celebrity endorsement to influence party-related vote intention. These effects were particularly pronounced for politically distant respondents; politically involved participants were less likely to vote for the endorsed party if a celebrity was involved. In regard to party image, empirical evidence is mixed. While Chou (2015) found celebrity endorsement in Taiwan to positively influence party image, an American study showed that the direction of effects depends on the spokesperson's likability. Unpopular endorsers rather impair party images, whereas well-liked celebrities enhance party evaluations (Nownes, 2012). The moderating effects of celebrity likability were partly replicated for Germany, where Friedrich and Steinleitner (2015) found that an unpopular spokesperson has a small, but negative impact on party image. These findings refer to the parasocial relationship between endorser and recipient (Brown, 2015). For celebrity endorsement to elicit desirable effects, recipients need to be at least slightly involved with the spokesperson, and it must not be a negative parasocial relationship.

Effectiveness of celebrity advocacy for political issues (4). For the fourth endorsement type, findings are mixed as well. Frizzell (2011) found a negative effect for celebrity endorsement of a military intervention, which led U.S. students to voice even less policy support. Two other studies showed the opposite, namely that young people voiced stronger support for political positions when celebrities rallied for these issues (Jackson, 2008; Jackson & Darrow, 2005). These studies further indicate that celebrities ought to carry certain characteristics in order to elicit positive effects. Political expertise and credibility (Frizzell, 2011), as well as favorability (Jackson & Darrow, 2005), turned out to be important moderating variables. The direction of effects obviously depends on whether citizens perceive celebrities as politically credible spokespersons and whether they like them. Well-liked stars with a proven track record of political activism elicit stronger effects than unpopular and politically inexperienced celebrities (Frizzell, 2011; Jackson & Darrow, 2005).

This assumption is also supported by studies on other types of celebrity political endorsement (e.g., Nownes, 2012; Pease & Brewer, 2008). To explain these differential effects, scholars primarily draw on concepts from advertising research, but increasingly combine them with approaches from political psychology (Atkinson & DeWitt, 2016). Two studies note that for celebrity political endorsement to be effective, citizens ought to form cognitive associations between the celebrity and the political message. If the celebrity has been actively campaigning for political issues and candidates in the past, recipients draw such associations more easily (Frizzell, 2011; Jackson & Darrow, 2005).

Summarizing the research to date, the studies draw a mixed picture of celebrity endorsement effectiveness in the political realm. Regardless of the endorsement type, researchers use the same dependent variables for measuring endorsement effectiveness: candidate image, party evaluation, viability assessment, vote intention, and voter turnout. While these variables have been subject to multiple empirical scrutiny, we are not aware of any study that has measured attitudinal endorsement effects on political institutions such as the EU. For the dependent variables that have been analyzed so far, the empirical evidence is inconsistent. Whereas in the United States, celebrity support tends to positively influence vote intentions and viability assessments for candidates, the candidates' personal image does not necessarily benefit. Influence on party image varies among the analyzed countries. Celebrity support in elections positively influences young Americans' vote intentions; however, this is not the case in Germany. There is also evidence that attitudes toward the spokesperson moderate political endorsement effects, especially likability, credibility, and political expertise. Overall, the empirical evidence indicates that celebrity political endorsement does elicit some positive effects in the United States (with preliminary evidence for Asia as well), whereas much less is known about its effectiveness in Europe.

The mixed findings can be explained on the one hand by characteristics of the recipients, such as party affiliation (Brubaker, 2011; Chou, 2015), political interest (Veer et al., 2010), age (Austin et al., 2008), and political experience (Garthwaite & Moore, 2013). On the other hand, celebrity attributes appear to play a crucial role, namely political expertise, trustworthiness, and likability, as well as the perceived congruence between a celebrity and the political message (Frizzell, 2011; Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Nownes, 2012). These aspects are also known to moderate commercial celebrity endorsement effects (e.g., Amos, Holmes, & Stratton, 2008; Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Most celebrity political endorsement studies draw on concepts that have initially been developed for commercial advertising, such as the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), the meaning-transfer model (McCracken, 1989), and the source-effectiveness models (Amos et al., 2008; Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990). However, scholars have paid little attention to the question of whether voter behavior can be conceptualized in the same way as consumer behavior (Atkinson & DeWitt, 2016; van Steenburg, 2015). Only a few studies have attempted to combine these marketing concepts with models used in political communication research. To explain the influence of celebrity political endorsement, they draw on approaches such as the third-person effect (e.g., Agina & Ekwevugbe, 2017; Brubaker, 2011) or information processing (e.g., Chou, 2015; Frizzell, 2011; Pease & Brewer, 2008). Information-processing approaches such as the elaboration-likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the concept of bounded rationality (Simon, 1990) posit that under normal conditions, people do in fact act rationally when relying on mental shortcuts (e.g., trusted sources) as guides for political reasoning (Schudson, 1998). Based on this political psychology perspective, Atkinson and DeWitt (2016) argue that politically distant voters are more susceptible to celebrity endorsement than politically interested voters because inattentive citizens tend to base their political reasoning on superficial considerations such as source attributes.

Source attributes also play a major role in the marketing models on celebrity endorsement effects. These models draw on characteristics already identified by the Yale Studies (e.g., Hovland, Irving, & Harold, 1953). A crucial prerequisite for using stars as mental shortcuts is their credibility. Ohanian (1990) developed a tricomponent model to measure celebrity credibility using source expertise, trustworthiness, and physical attractiveness as indicators. The model has then been adapted to the logic of political communication. Studies on celebrity political endorsement largely neglect physical attractiveness, for instance. This can be explained by the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), which posits a fit (or match) between the endorser and the endorsed object as a crucial prerequisite for endorsement effects. In this rationale, political messages do not match with attributes such as physical appearance, but with expertise and trustworthiness. Most political communication researchers thus investigate celebrities' perceived political expertise, trustworthiness, and likability as moderating variables (e.g., Morin, Ivory, & Tubbs, 2012; Nownes, 2012).

Expertise, as defined by Hovland and colleagues (1953), describes to what degree recipients perceive a communicator to be a source of valid assertions. The concept refers to an endorser's knowledge, experience, and skills. In combination with the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), politically experienced spokespersons can be expected to be the better choice for celebrity political endorsement than celebrities who have not yet voiced political statements or supported political candidates (Frizzell, 2011; Jackson & Darrow, 2005). Whereas expertise taps the cognitive dimension of credibility, trustworthiness relates to the emotional dimension. Erdogan (1999) defines trustworthiness as "honesty, integrity and believability of an endorser" (p. 297). Especially when it comes to opinionated messages—which political statements are by nature—trustworthy communicators yield stronger effects than spokespersons who are less trusted (Miller & Baseheart, 1969). Trustworthiness, in turn, is associated with endorser likability, defined as "affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behavior" (Erdogan, 1999, p. 299). Several scholars replicated this finding in the political context and observed endorsement effects for participants

with favorable opinions of the celebrities (Nownes, 2012; Pease & Brewer, 2008). Both trustworthiness and likability require a minimum of knowledge about the source; otherwise, recipients would not hold attitudes toward the celebrity.

In addition to source attributes, certain characteristics of the recipients need to be taken into consideration. First, recipients' susceptibility to celebrity political endorsement depends on their level of political interest. Politically interested people pay closer attention to political messages and put more cognitive effort into the elaboration of information. Opposed to that, politically disinterested people tend to rely on mental shortcuts and elaborate the given information on a superficial level (Atkinson & DeWitt, 2016; Schudson, 1998). Second, recipients evaluate spokespersons against the background of their personal identity. In the marketing literature, this relationship is modeled as celebrity-user congruence, arguing that endorsers and recipients should share a minimum of characteristics for the endorsement to elicit any kind of effects (e.g., Kamins & Gupta, 1994). We therefore include gender to control for possible moderating effects when endorsers' and participants' gender match.

The theoretical model (see Figure 1) guiding our empirical research departs from the source-effectiveness models and conceptualizes celebrities as information sources in election campaigns. As such, it incorporates the characteristics known to play a crucial role in recipients' source evaluations. We expect endorser expertise, trustworthiness, and likability to serve as central moderating variables because recipients use these source attributes as cues for the quality and correctness of a given message (Chaiken, 1987). For recipients' characteristics, we focus on gender and political interest as central moderating variables.

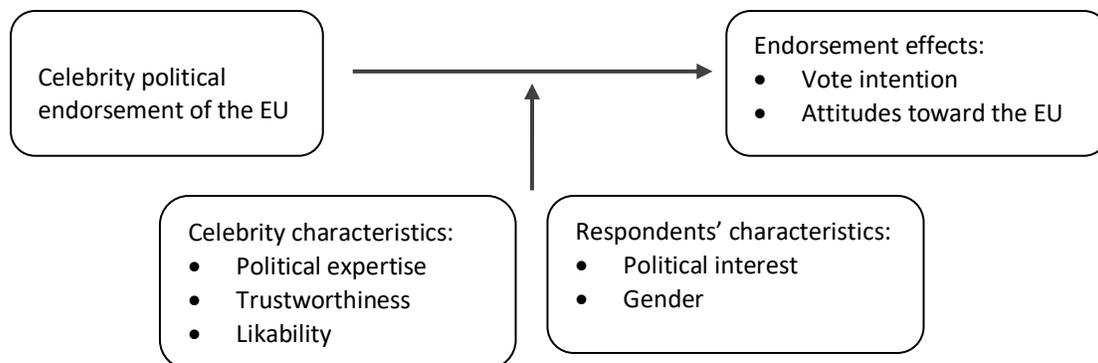


Figure 1. Theoretical model for EU-related celebrity endorsement effects.

These considerations form the theoretical basis to investigate whether celebrity political endorsement is an effective campaign strategy in the context of the European parliamentary elections in 2014. Six hypotheses are guiding our experimental study:

H1: In comparison to an advertisement with an unknown person, celebrity endorsement will (a) improve attitudes toward the EU and (b) strengthen vote intentions for the European parliamentary elections.

- H2: The higher respondents rate a celebrity's political expertise, the more the endorsement will (a) improve their attitudes toward the EU and (b) strengthen their intention to vote in the European parliamentary elections.*
- H3: The more respondents consider a celebrity to be trustworthy, the more the endorsement will (a) improve their attitudes toward the EU and (b) strengthen their intention to vote in the European parliamentary elections.*
- H4: The more respondents like a celebrity, the more the endorsement will (a) improve their attitudes toward the EU and (b) strengthen their intention to vote in the European parliamentary elections.*
- H5: The less politically interested respondents are, the more the endorsement will (a) improve their attitudes toward the EU and (b) strengthen their intention to vote in the European parliamentary elections.*
- H6: Effects on (a) attitudes toward the EU and (b) vote intention in the European parliamentary elections will be stronger when endorsers' and respondents' gender match.*

Method and Data

To test the hypotheses, we ran online experiments in five European countries two weeks ahead of the European parliamentary elections (May 2014). European-wide elections carry certain advantages for comparative research: Citizens of all 28 EU member states vote for the same political institution. Although there is no uniform voting system, the election outcome bundles national votes in pan-national parliamentary groups, such as the center-right EPP or the European Socialists and Democrats (S&D). In addition, national campaigns tend to emphasize the European dimension of the election (e.g., Van Os, Wester, & Jankowski, 2007). This background allows the use of pan-national stimuli with an identical political message as independent variable, as well as equal formulations for the dependent variables—both prerequisites for experimental research in cross-cultural settings. To facilitate our comparative design across five countries, we could ask for neither national party images nor specific candidates (voting systems for the European parliament are based on national party lists). We therefore opted for a fictitious image campaign in the context of the European parliamentary elections. This allowed us to measure attitudes toward the EU, in addition to vote intention.

Stimuli

The experimental stimuli were EU image advertisements with the European parliament's logo and the slogan "European Union. This is about us," addressing the collective identity of European citizens and the EU's responsiveness for its citizens. We took both the slogan and the advertisement's layout from the official EU image campaign *European Year of the Citizens 2013*. The campaign was designed to activate European citizenship identity and to indirectly push voter turnout in the run-up to the European elections in May 2014 (European Union, 2013).

To identify suitable celebrity endorsers, we ran a pilot study with students from Germany, Poland, Spain, and Sweden ($N = 193$). In total, we tested six European celebrities (combined in couples from the same professions: singers, soccer players, actresses)² for familiarity, likability, and political expertise (three items, 5-point semantic differentials). Instead of using different celebrities, we chose to use identical spokespersons in all countries. Even though the spokespersons' characteristics (e.g., nationality or gender) might evoke different responses across the countries, both the European elections' character and methodological aspects support our choice. Using the same stimuli across all countries allows direct comparisons of findings and minimizes possible confounding effects stemming from different celebrities.

Across all countries, U2 front man Bono and British pop star Robbie Williams received the highest familiarity ratings among the six celebrities ($M_{\text{Bono}} = 3.48$, $SD = 1.35$, $M_{\text{Robbie}} = 3.75$, $SD = 1.12$). Their high popularity ratings suggest that the singers are internationally well known and thus qualify as celebrity endorsers for our pan-national experimental conditions. Compared with the other celebrity couples, Bono and Robbie Williams also differed the most about their perceived political expertise ($M_{\text{Bono}} = 3.54$, $SD = .80$, $M_{\text{Robbie}} = 2.63$, $SD = .78$). The control condition featured a noncelebrity young man, while we kept the slogan and the layout exactly as in the experimental conditions.

Sample

The experiments were conducted in Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Spain, and Sweden.³ The five countries represent not only the regional variety of the EU but also varying degrees of public trust in the EU as a political institution. At the time of the study, only 16% of British and Spanish citizens said that they "tend to trust" the EU. In Sweden and Poland, public trust in the EU was at 41% and 37%, respectively, with Germany in between at 30% (Eurobarometer 81, 2014).

To ensure comparability of the data, we used national students' samples. Participants were recruited from undergraduate classes (Great Britain, Poland, and Spain), via a commercial polling institute (Sweden), and via an online convenience panel (Germany). Overall, 971 students completed the online questionnaire, with slightly varying national sample sizes due to recruitment strategies and response rates (see Table 1). A total of 55.3% of the participants were female, the average age was 23 years, and political interest was rather high ($M = 3.0$ on a 4-point scale, $SD = .93$). Since most studies on celebrity political endorsement focus on young voters who pay much attention to popular culture and celebrities (Austin et al., 2008), a student sample can offer valuable insights into the potential effects of celebrity endorsement on younger European citizens.

² Bono and Robbie Williams (singers), David Beckham and Zlatan Ibrahimovic (soccer players), Kate Winslet and Keira Knightley (actresses).

³ The Swedish project was funded by the Anne-Marie och Gustaf Anders Stiftelse for media research.

Table 1. National Samples.

Country	Respondents <i>N</i>	Age <i>M (SD)</i>	Gender: Female (%)	Political interest <i>M (SD)</i>
Germany	355	22.1 (2.7)	59.2	3.1 (.9)
Great Britain	120	22.5 (6.5)	59.2	3.3 (.9)
Poland	102	23.0 (3.3)	61.8	3.2 (.9)
Spain	204	22.5 (4.0)	59.3	2.8 (.9)
Sweden	190	25.7 (8.4)	37.9	2.7 (.8)
Overall	971	23.0 (5.3)	55.3	3.0 (.9)

Measures and Procedure

For the experiments, a between-subjects design with posttest measure, we used the online survey platform SoSci Survey. It allows for both randomized assignment and administration of the questionnaire in various languages. Respondents were invited via e-mail to participate in "a study on the European parliamentary elections 2014." The e-mails contained a link to the online questionnaire (translated into national languages), with randomized assignment to the experimental conditions. After a short introduction, participants saw one of the stimuli and subsequently answered the questions. A check of equivalence indicated that the groups did not differ with respect to political interest, gender, and age.⁴

Dependent variables. The comparative design required the use of pan-national dependent variables. As such, we used vote intention as behavioral response, while items related to the EU and its institutions tapped attitudinal responses. Vote intention was measured by asking participants how likely it was that they would go to the polls for the European elections in May 2014 (5-point scale ranging from 1 = *very unlikely* to 5 = *very likely*). Attitudes toward the EU and its institutions were measured on 5-point Likert scales (with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree* as anchors). We resorted to items from the Eurobarometer 81 (2014) and from de Vreese and Semetko (2002), who measured EU-related attitudes in the context of the 2000 Danish euro referendum. The items used in the following analyses are "European integration is being pushed too far," "You can generally trust the EU institutions to do what is right," and "Overall, my home country benefits from being a member of the EU."

Moderating variables. Endorser attributes, gender, and political interest served as moderating variables. For political expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990), we used 11-point semantic differentials. Political expertise was tapped by the attributes politically passive/active, unqualified/qualified for political statements, and not informed/well informed about politics. Trustworthiness was measured by asking respondents to evaluate how dishonest/honest, untrustworthy/trustworthy, and unreliable/reliable the celebrities seemed to them. Cronbach's alphas were above 0.8 (or in three cases very close to 0.8), which allowed us to calculate indices for these items. Endorser likability was measured by the item "I like Bono/Robbie Williams" (5-point scale; see also Pease & Brewer, 2008). Overall, respondents held indifferent

⁴ One exception emerges for Poland, where we found significant group differences for gender. However, this group difference cannot be traced back to the sampling strategy because the online survey tool automatically randomized assignments to the groups.

to slightly positive attitudes toward the endorsers. Bono had overall higher scores for expertise and trustworthiness than Robbie Williams,⁵ while the British pop singer scored slightly better than Bono in regard to likability.⁶ To tap recipients' characteristics, we asked respondents to indicate their political interest and orientation, as well as their participation in the 2009 elections. Political interest was measured on a 4-point scale, with *hardly at all* and *most of the time* as anchors. In addition, we asked participants to state their gender in order to investigate H6 on gender congruence between the endorsers and our respondents.

Results

The descriptive analysis of the data reveals that across all five countries, respondents hold indifferent to slightly negative attitudes toward EU institutions (trust in EU institutions: $M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.02$),⁷ but rate the national benefits of being a member of the EU rather high ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.09$).⁸ In addition, they evaluate the European integration process slightly positive (inverted item: $M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.20$).⁹ Their intention to vote in the European parliamentary elections is quite high ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.24$), with the highest ratings in Germany ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .93$) and the lowest in Spain ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.45$). These results are contrary to the Eurobarometer data, which show low levels of support for EU institutions in Spain and Great Britain (16% in both countries), and citizens opposing further EU enlargement in Germany and Great Britain (both 71%; Eurobarometer 81, 2014). The positive attitudes toward the EU in our study are probably due to our young samples, given that students generally tend to be more open and supportive toward European integration and EU institutions.

Main Effects (H1)

In H1, we expected celebrity endorsements to be more effective than the endorsement of an unknown spokesperson. To test this hypothesis, we calculated one-factorial analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The results are rather unexpected. In none of the five countries do the endorsements elicit effects on vote intention (H1b). Significant attitudinal effects toward the EU and its institutions (H1a) show for Germany and Spain (see Table 2) but not for Great Britain, Poland, and Sweden. In Germany, Robbie Williams' endorsement has a significant positive effect on how respondents judge European integration. However, the

⁵ Lowest and highest scores for Bono. *Expertise*: $M = 6.2$, $SD = 1.8$ (Poland), $M = 7.1$, $SD = 1.9$ (Germany). *Trustworthiness*: $M = 6.4$, $SD = 1.7$ (Great Britain), $M = 7.1$, $SD = 1.8$ (Sweden). *Likability*: $M = 2.9$, $SD = 0.9$ (Great Britain), $M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.0$ (Spain). Higher scores equal higher expertise, trustworthiness, and likability.

⁶ Lowest and highest scores for Robbie Williams. *Expertise*: $M = 4.1$, $SD = 1.7$ (Great Britain), $M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.5$ (Sweden). *Trustworthiness*: $M = 5.5$, $SD = 1.6$ (Great Britain), $M = 6.3$, $SD = 1.6$ (Poland). *Likability*: $M = 3.2$, $SD = 1.1$ (Sweden), $M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.1$ (Spain). Higher scores equal higher expertise, trustworthiness, and likability.

⁷ Lowest and highest scores for trust in EU institutions: Spain: $M = 2.5$, $SD = 1.0$; Great Britain: $M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.0$.

⁸ Lowest and highest scores for national benefits of membership: Sweden: $M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.2$; Germany: $M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.0$.

⁹ Lowest and highest support for EU integration process (inverted item): Poland: $M = 3.0$ ($SD = 1.3$); Germany: $M = 2.4$ ($SD = 1.2$).

advertisement with Bono elicits no significant effects. In the Spanish sample, both celebrities negatively influence participants' attitudes toward European integration. These findings contradict the expected direction of effects as formulated in H1: Based on theoretical considerations, we expected positive endorsement effects.

Table 2. Celebrity Endorsement Effects on Attitudes Toward European Integration.

	Bono's endorsement	Robbie's endorsement	Noncelebrity endorsement		
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F (df)</i>	<i>p</i>
Spain	(<i>n</i> = 72)	(<i>n</i> = 67)	(<i>n</i> = 65)		
European integration	2.86** (1.03)	2.76* (1.13)	2.31**/* (.99)	5.26 (2, 201)	.006
Germany	(<i>n</i> = 114)	(<i>n</i> = 124)	(<i>n</i> = 117)		
European integration	2.46 (1.16)	2.23* (1.07)	2.43* (1.27)	3.726 (2, 231.58)	.026

Note. ANOVAs, post-hoc-tests: Bonferroni (Spain), Games/Howell (Germany), * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Means based on 5-point Likert-scales, standard deviations, and degrees of freedom in parentheses.

Moderating Effects (H2 to H6)

Given that respondents in all five countries hold rather indifferent opinions of the two singers, Bono's and Robbie's political expertise, trustworthiness, and likability might have inhibited overall endorsement effects. To test whether attitudes toward the two celebrities have suppressed endorsement effects, we conducted moderation analyses. Theoretically, we expected positive effects for respondents who perceive the celebrities' political expertise as high (H2), who trust them (H3), and who like them (H4). Furthermore, we expected politically disinterested participants to be more prone to celebrity endorsement effects than politically interested respondents (H5) and stronger endorsement effects for male than for female respondents (H6).

These characteristics were included as moderating variables in the theoretical model (see Figure 1). To test the assumptions, we calculated regression analyses with the following predictors: endorsement conditions (dummy coded), mean-centered moderating variables (celebrity attributes: political expertise, trustworthiness, likability; respondents' characteristics: political interest, gender), and interaction terms of the endorsements and the mean-centered moderators. To estimate the marginal effects of the endorsements at different levels of the moderating variables, we further probed significant interaction effects with the Johnson-Neyman technique (see Hayes, 2013). For the moderation analyses, we only considered the samples from Germany, Spain, and Sweden; the smaller British and Polish samples did not allow interaction effects testing because of limited statistical power.

Of all calculated regression analyses (40 per country), only five models reveal significant interaction effects, and they are very small in terms of magnitude (see Table 3). Again, the few moderating effects show only for attitudes toward the EU and regard political experience and likability (H2a, H4a), while we

found no effects for vote intention (H2b, H3b, H4b). Surprisingly, neither gender (H6) nor political interest (H5) moderated the effects in any of the conditions and countries. This contradicts some of the basic theoretical assumptions of celebrity political endorsement. Celebrity support is expected to work especially for people with little political interest who tend to rely on mental shortcuts such as the source when processing information (e.g., Atkinson & DeWitt, 2016). Endorser–recipient congruence (e.g., Kamins & Gupta, 1994), operationalized as gender-related congruence, did not show to be a relevant moderating aspect in our study either.

A closer look at the five significant regression models reveals that the interaction effects do not correspond to the theoretical assumptions. First, the endorsers do not elicit the same effects across all countries. In Spain, the interaction effect only shows in the condition with Bono, whereas the German and Swedish samples reveal moderating effects for Robbie Williams' endorsement. This opposes the theoretical assumption that the endorser with high political expertise (Bono) causes stronger effects than the politically inexperienced one (Robbie Williams).

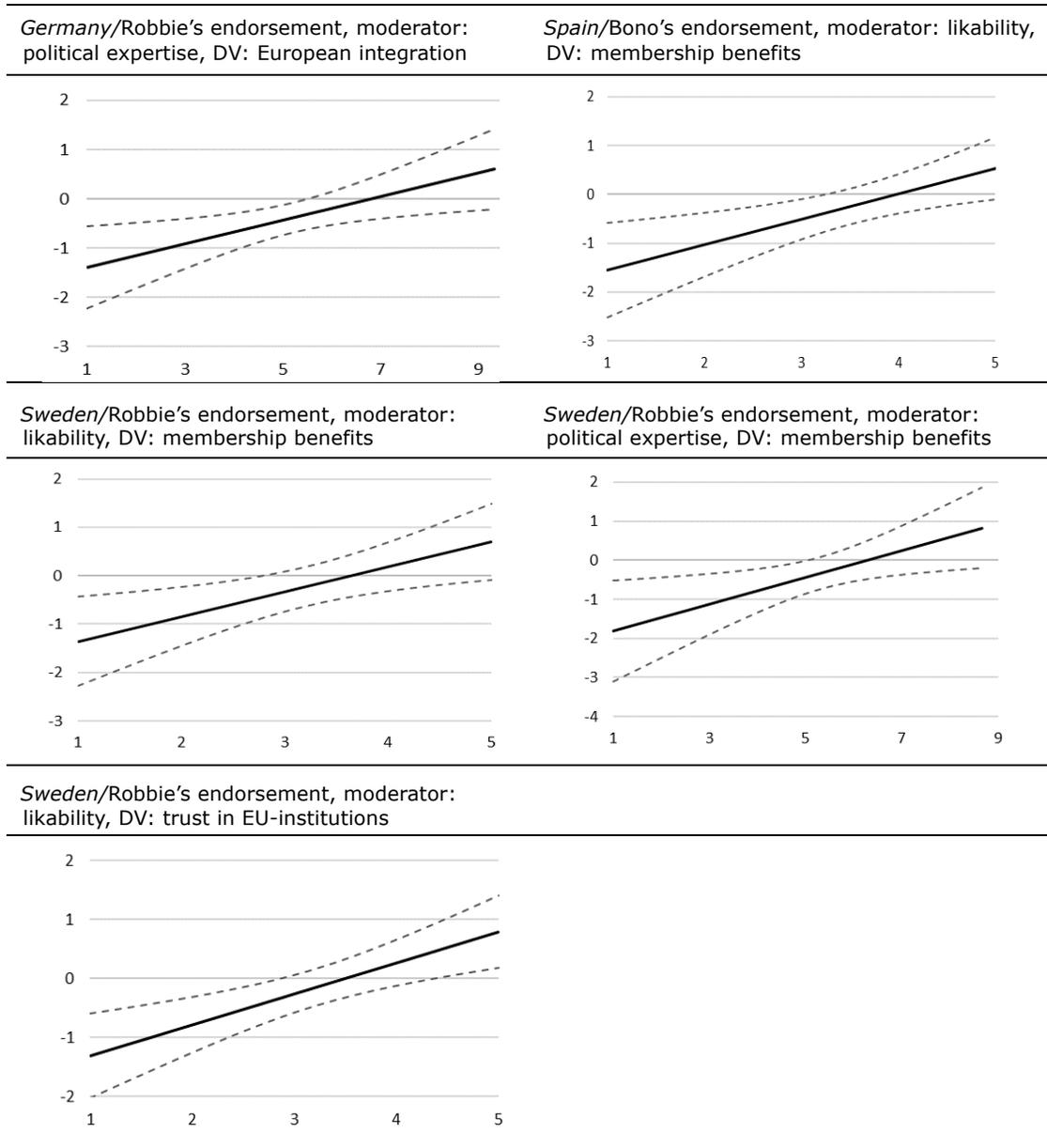
Second, national differences regarding the moderating variables become visible. Whereas in Sweden, both likability and political expertise turn out to be relevant moderating variables, only one moderator demonstrates interaction effects in Spain (likability) and Germany (political expertise). Trustworthiness has no moderating effect in any of the countries. Given that we expected trustworthiness to be an important source cue—especially when it comes to opinionated messages (Amos et al., 2008) such as political endorsements—this is a rather surprising finding.

Third, the directions of the moderating effects differ across the countries (see Figure 2). Follow-up analyses based on the Johnson-Neyman technique reveal that in Spain, the interaction is a negative reinforcement effect. Spanish participants with indifferent to negative attitudes toward Bono show a more pronounced negative judgment on the EU in general. In Germany, the interaction effect is counterintuitive to the expected direction. Indifferent to negative attitudes toward Robbie Williams lead participants to voice even more support for the European integration process. This is a paradoxical finding: The more German respondents dislike a celebrity endorser, the more they value European integration. The most pronounced picture emerges for Sweden, where we found not only a negative reinforcement effect for people who are indifferent or opposed to Robbie Williams, but also a positive reinforcement effect on attitudes toward the EU when respondents are extremely fond of the singer. This result is in line with the theoretical assumptions. We also found first signs of this reinforcement effect in the Spanish sample, where the prefix of the marginal endorsement effect changes for high levels of likability but does not reach statistical significance.

Table 3. Moderating Effects of Endorser Characteristics.

	European integration	Advantages of membership	Trust in EU institutions
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)
Spain (<i>n</i> = 117)			
<i>Moderator: likability (Bono)</i>			
Endorsement Bono		-2.079** (.656)	
Likability Bono		-.302* (.516)	
Endorsement* likability		.522** (.178)	
<i>R</i> ²		.083*	
<i>R</i> ² increase due to interaction		.070**	
Sweden (<i>n</i> = 112)			
<i>Moderator: likability (Robbie)</i>			
Endorsement Robbie		-1.873** (.640)	-1.833*** (.148)
Likability Robbie		-.060 (.091)	-.112 (.115)
Endorsement* likability		.514** (.189)	.524*** (.501)
<i>R</i> ²		.135**	.171***
<i>R</i> ² increase due to interaction		.059**	.097***
<i>Moderator: expertise (Robbie)</i>			
Endorsement Robbie		-2.151* (.788)	
Expertise Robbie		-.024 (.092)	
Endorsement* expertise		.344* (.142)	
<i>R</i> ²		.092*	
<i>R</i> ² increase due to interaction		.049*	
Germany (<i>n</i> = 239)			
<i>Moderator: expertise (Robbie)</i>			
Endorsement Robbie	-1.632* (.511)		
Expertise Robbie	-.144** (.064)		
Endorsement* expertise	.240* (.094)		
<i>R</i> ²	.057*		
<i>R</i> ² increase due to interaction	.027*		

Note. Multiple regressions (explained variance: *R*²). Mean-centered moderators, experimental conditions: dummy coded. Unstandardized regression coefficients *b*, heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors *SE* (estimator: HC3). * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001 (two-tailed).



Note. Marginal effects b as moderator values change. Horizontal axes: levels of moderating variables, vertical axes: marginal endorsement effects b , ——— marginal effects, - - - 95% confidence intervals

Figure 2. Conditional effects of celebrity endorsements (Johnson-Neyman plots).

Based on these analyses, H2 to H6 are not supported. Taking the findings together, the evidence suggests that celebrity endorsement in the context of the European parliamentary elections barely matters for young Europeans. The few overall effects of our experiments are supported by a meta-analysis of international studies on celebrity endorsement (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). However, the authors found strong endorsement effects when considering theoretically relevant moderating variables. Our results differ from this meta-analysis insofar as the data reveal few and rather weak significant interaction effects. The effects are, furthermore, inconclusive and restricted to the moderating variables likability and political expertise. Trustworthiness showed no significant effect, and respondents' characteristics (political interest, gender) played no role at all.

Discussion

The transnational prevalence of celebrity political endorsement raises the question of what kind of impact such testimonials actually have. The present study addressed this question by focusing on endorsement effects in Europe. In the context of the 2014 European parliamentary elections, we conducted online experiments in Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. In doing so, the study not only adds a European perspective to the international corpus of empirical evidence that is dominated by research from the United States, but also implements a multiple-countries design that goes beyond the single-case approach in this field of research. Based on the findings of previous studies and on theoretical considerations, we also considered the impact of several moderating variables (endorser: political experience, likability, trustworthiness; recipients: gender, political interest).

Overall, there is no conclusive evidence for celebrity endorsement effects in Europe. The global analyses (H1) revealed only two significant main effects, which furthermore did not parallel the theoretically expected patterns of endorsement effects. A similar picture emerges for the moderating analyses. While we found no effects for trustworthiness (H3), the singers' political expertise and likability (H2, H4) moderated endorsement effects in only few conditions and did not reveal a systematic pattern in terms of direction. These findings do not allow for a concise definition regarding which endorser attributes reinforce or suppress political endorsement effects. What appears as a first tendency is that celebrity political endorsement can elicit a negative reinforcement effect if recipients hold indifferent to negative opinions toward the endorser. Even though the data allow only for a cautious interpretation, this tendency is in line with other studies that found negative reinforcement effects when respondents disliked the celebrity (Friedrich & Steinleitner, 2015; Nownes, 2012). Campaign managers across Europe should therefore evaluate very carefully whether to implement celebrity support within their campaign strategies. Unpopular celebrities could actually damage the campaign rather than help the cause.

Despite the promising approach of a multiple-countries experimental design, some methodological limitations of the current study might have contributed to the few and inconclusive effects. A singular stimulus like the endorsements used in our experiments might only elicit very small effects, if any—especially when it comes to long-standing attitudes such as opinions toward the EU. Another limitation regards the samples of young and formally well-educated students, whose overall high level of political interest may have prevented effects. This is in line with Atkinson and DeWitt's (2016) rationale that politically interested citizens are less likely to rely on external cues (e.g., information sources) for political reasoning. It is also supported by Veer and colleagues' (2010) finding that celebrity political endorsement

effects are less likely for politically interested people. Given that the students in all our samples voiced high interest in politics, this might in fact have been a problematic target group to investigate whether a low-involvement election like the European parliamentary election facilitates stronger celebrity endorsement effects than national elections, which normally stimulate higher levels of interest.

In addition, the chosen endorsers could be responsible for the limited findings. Even though Bono and Robbie Williams received high familiarity ratings, our young respondents might not have accepted them as guides for political opinion formation, given the singers' age and advanced stage of their careers. Furthermore, sample sizes might not have been big enough to detect endorsement effects. Indeed, there are cautious signs that with bigger sample sizes and accordingly more statistical power, the positive reinforcement effect found in Sweden might also be traceable in other countries. Gender, too, did not moderate endorsement effects. Across all countries, male and female respondents reacted in the same way to the male celebrity endorsers. Thus, at least in regard to gender, the theoretically postulated endorser-user congruence (Kamins & Gupta, 1994) did not play a role.

Beyond methodological aspects, we can draw some theoretical conclusions from these findings. Our model for EU-related celebrity endorsement effects builds on the source-effectiveness models, which were initially developed for commercial advertising. As such, scholars use them to explain how celebrities affect consumers' attitudes toward products and brands, or their purchase decisions (e.g., Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990). Even though trustworthiness, likability, and expertise turned out to be important source characteristics in both political persuasion and commercial advertising, our data did not reveal systematic patterns for these endorser attributes. Instead, our study adds empirical evidence to the literature that questions the *voter as consumer* paradigm of political marketing (van Steenburg, 2015), which puts voters on the same level with consumers and treats voting like purchase decisions. The present models cannot explain why the celebrities' political expertise and trustworthiness barely matter in the European context, while we know from political communication research that these characteristics function as important source cues for political opinion formation in general (e.g., Andreoli & Worchel, 1978). A possible explanation might be that European citizens have stronger reservations about celebrities as sources for political opinion formation. Future research should therefore investigate whether different types of spokespersons (e.g., journalists, celebrities, intellectuals) elicit different levels of acceptance as guides for political opinion formation in Europe. These considerations also disclose that subcultural differences should be investigated in future research, such as age-related, ethnic, or other social nuances that might lead recipients to perceive a higher congruence between a celebrity endorser and themselves (e.g., Kamins & Gupta, 1994).

Overall, our findings support the assumption that celebrity political endorsement effects are culture bound. Marketing research has already addressed the role of cultural norms for commercial celebrity endorsement effectiveness (e.g., Biswas, Hussain, & O'Donnell, 2009; Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005). These studies use the meaning-transfer model by McCracken (1989) to explain that effective celebrity endorsement needs to "mirror the fundamental cultural orientations and values" of a society (Choi et al., 2005, p. 86). While cross-cultural differences are also a key focus in political advertising research (van Steenburg, 2015), studies on celebrity political endorsement have not yet considered different national backgrounds systematically, and comparative studies are overdue. The theoretical concept of celebrities as cultural products can help to shed light on this aspect. According to Turner (2004), celebrities are embedded

within national cultural industries (1); their fame depends on both national media markets (2) and audiences (3). It is likely to assume that celebrity political endorsement is more effective in countries with big film and music markets, like the United States, than in European countries, where entertainment industries are notably smaller, and language barriers of national media systems impede international visibility and fame. Only a few European celebrities have reached similar levels of fame as superstars from Hollywood or the American music industry. Even though Bono and Robbie Williams certainly belong to this category and can be regarded as transnational celebrities, they failed to affect the young audiences of our samples. Turner's (2004) third component of celebrity might help to explain this failure. Society-wide audience acceptance (3) becomes increasingly difficult to reach in high-choice media environments with accelerated audience fragmentation (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017). As a possible side effect, audience fragmentation might restrict the cultural significance of stars. Celebrities might nowadays share "fundamental cultural orientations and values" (Choi et al., 2005, p. 86) only with specific fan communities, but not necessarily with a society at large. Transferred to the context of the European elections, Europe might possibly be lacking internationally well-known (and well-liked) stars who can serve as acceptable guides for political opinion formation not only within distinct fan communities (subcultural level), but also across various societal segments (national level) and different societies within the EU (international level). Because our comparative design focused on national differences, cultural nuances below the national level—such as ethnicity, social status, or leaning toward popular subcultures—could not be investigated. For future research on celebrity political endorsement effects, it is therefore necessary to consider national political contexts, cultural differences, and subcultural nuances.

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