

MAGAZINE CELEBRITY FEATURES, YOUTH MODELLING AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

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Abstract

Youths learn a lot from the celebrities that dot the pages of magazines. The celebrities themselves, being human, present both positive and negative aspects of their lives to the vulnerable youths who unwittingly accommodate and imitate them. When youths access media content, they could interpret this to suit their gullible dispositions. Considering the growing interest of Nigerian youths in these magazine features, it becomes necessary therefore, to examine how these celebrities are influencing the choices of career of Nigerian youths. This study made use of the survey method. National Youth Service Corps members in Ogun State, Nigeria were chosen purposively as the population based on the assumption that they are at the stage of taking a final decision on what career they want to choose. Findings revealed that Nigerian youths admire and consider magazine celebrities as successful people. It was also observed that the youths desire to be like the personalities they admire. It was further discovered that these youths make deliberate efforts to be like their admired celebrities. This research also shows that the personalities that are most admired by Nigerian youths are Business Moguls. Based on the findings, the study recommends that print media houses should deliberately introduce a balance in the categories of celebrities they feature since most of these have effects on the people who read them especially young people. Furthermore, the media houses should be careful not to celebrate negative aspects of a personality's life.

Key words: Celebrity, Career aspirations, Magazine features, Model, Motivation, Youth

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is witnessing an increasing wave in youth fascination with celebrity idolization. This trend is enhanced by the many available media of communication namely, the newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the internet. These celebrities are presented in different shades, reflecting various fields of human attainment. With constant innovations in technology, the youths are, so to say, totally equipped for constant touch with these apparent larger than life heroes who, in the consciousness of the youth, represent all that one needs to be in life. Today, the youth need not attend the cinema; or such other forms of social interactional avenues to be able to meet their celebrity idols. They have at their disposal, the internet, and the various social networks such as you tube, Twitter, and Face book among other new and emerging technological media. With a click of the button on the right electronic device, celebrities pop up to the youths, cajoling and luring them to come over to their sunny side of life.

In all ages and cultures, youths are the most vulnerable to fads and fancies. Nigerian youths are no exception. They fall victim too easily to popular opinion and social tastes; this is evident in the way they patronize the various media through which

celebrities are presented to the society. Although they may not be as endowed as their peers in the technologically advanced countries as to maximize the use of the new media technology for accessing celebrities, yet they interact all the same using the media that are available to them.

One of such is the print media, this constitute a ready means through which youths access their celebrity heroes. They rely more on the print media especially, the magazine medium. Among the most common are: *Guardian Life; This Day Style; City People; Encomium; True Love; and Genevieve*. These magazines, though, not strictly targeted at the youth, nevertheless, receive high patronage by youths include the fact that they are highly impressionistic. Youths have more tendency of yielding to external influences, especially, if such are coming from persons of prominence in the society. Youths have more time at their disposal, and with their adventurous spirit, they would like to maximize the opportunity of spending this abundant time, exploring and connecting with persons of social worth.

There is no doubt that youths learn a lot from the celebrities that dot the pages of these magazines. The celebrities themselves, being human, present their strengths and weaknesses which the undiscerning youths unwittingly and uncritically access, accommodate and ape. How much influence these celebrities exert on the youths and the direction in which they influence the youths need to be determined. It is for this reason that this paper investigates the influence of magazine celebrity features on the career aspiration and social modelling tendencies of Nigerian youths.

The media of mass communication have the duty of meeting the information need of the society; and one can rightly say that the Nigerian media are doing this to a great extent. However, quite frequently, these messages are misinterpreted by some segments of the society. One of such is the Nigerian youth. They are vulnerable, and most times, absorb whatever information the media offer them without question. When they access media content, they could interpret this to suit their gullible dispositions. One media content which is attracting Nigerian youths to a point of concern is magazine celebrity features. These agenda could be of benefit, just as they could be detrimental to youths. Considering the growing interest of Nigerian youths in these magazine features, it becomes necessary therefore, to examine how these celebrities are influencing the choices of career of Nigerian youths as well as their social mobility aspirations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper leans towards the principles of social learning theory. It is our conviction that a lot of changes can take place in the lives of media audience as they interact with their characters of choice. We agree with Albert Bandura, the most notable of those who propounded this theory, that as individuals observe their models, they can in turn begin to act and think like these models. To this extent, we adopt Bandura's postulation that the three essential factors that can enhance behaviour change in an individual are: the ability to remember what one has observed (attention retention); ability to replicate such behaviour (reproduction); and having a good reason for the learning (motivation). Youths, who are the subject of this paper, are predisposed to these salient factors.

We also agree with Cornell Montgomery (1843-1904), who actually is the precursor of the Social Learning theory, that through close contact, imitation of superiors, understanding of concepts and role model behaviour, individuals can experience the

modification of their perspectives. Thus through observation, imitation and reinforcement a whole lot of changes can take place in an individual leading to a complex process of behaviour change.

TRANSLATING CELEBRITY FANCY TO REALITY IN THE LIVES OF YOUTHS

The mass media, in particular, magazines have a powerful influence on how people dress, behave and relate to others, as well as our language, values and attitudes. Through the socialisation function, the media contents help people to learn the values, beliefs, and norms of other cultures in the process, individuals develop their own sense of self worth. In the case of the youths, these media contents create for them an appealing image and by this, control the variety of material youths incorporate in their daily lives. The youthful age is a vulnerable one and in a quest for belonging and discovery, they follow the trends as seen in the media.

The media are everywhere; and their jobs include finding the truth and telling it to people. In carrying out these functions, the media bring reports the bulk of which are dominated by important people otherwise known as celebrities. Celebrities could be from the entertainment industry, sports world, business sector, politics and other areas.

Schlecht (2003) defines celebrities as:

people who enjoy public recognition by a large share of a certain group of people. Whereas attributes like attractiveness, extraordinary lifestyle or special skills are just examples and specific common characteristics cannot be observed, it can be said that within a corresponding social group celebrities generally differ from the social norm and enjoy a high degree of public awareness.

Schroeter (2002) in Cyril de Run, Butt, and Yen Nee (2010) defines celebrities as “individuals who achieve a certain degree of fame across or among a section of a society; they can be actors, sports persons, politicians, or pop icons. Their fame and success allow them to inspire and influence others.”

Youths today look up to celebrities for their everyday fashion tips, movies, albums and their general way of life. The youthful stage is a very confusing period filled with changes and challenges, and is a period where an individual feels the need to "belong" and to be "accepted". When this need is created, the youth look for ways to fill the gap and most often turn to the media to perform this role. The magazines often are the most accessible.

Hood (n.d.) suggests that “celebrities are most like salespersons. Adding further that “though they may not explicitly try to persuade their audiences, they are subconsciously altering the thoughts of their publics; this can be seen through celebrity endorsements, press interviews, apparel worn during public events, items favoured by celebrities, celebrity-branded products and celebrities’ overall brand image all of which create epidemics of societal acceptance among various social groups.”

These images of celebrities often provide the basis from which youths benchmark their thoughts, opinions and associations. The youth perceive such images as the social norm and, thus, as a means to attain the social acceptance that is so vital to their personal maturation.

INFLUENCE OF CELEBRITIES ON YOUTHS

Youths are affected by the messages and images the media feeds them with. Some of these images give them ideas of how to look and act to be accepted in today's community. These magazines stress that the way you look defines the person you are. This causes people to be self-absorbed and self-conscious. Some go to the extent to add that 'a man is defined by the stuff he owns, while a woman is defined by the way she looks'.

Taylor and Stern (1997); Weiss (2004) in Cyril de Run, Butt, and Yen Nee (2010) posit that "teenagers and young adults are more susceptible to be influenced by celebrities as compared to mature population. Teenagers tend to follow the footsteps of celebrities to accommodate characteristic that they are lacking in their personal life. Many teenagers dress and behave like their favorite entertainer." Weiss (2004) adds that "this allows them to compensate their low self-esteem" (Cyril de Run, Butt, and Yen Nee, 2010).

Everelles and Leavitt (1992) in Cyril de Run et al. (2010) further add that "there are some who would go over the limits by having plastic surgery just to look like their favorite celebrities."

The influence of celebrity image and its effect on the youth is an issue. The question is, is it always negative or can celebrity image be a good influence? The lifestyle of these important people can be viewed from the positive and also the negative sides. When youths see movie stars, a musician performing or even some sports people, they liken themselves to such people wishing they could do all that and wondering what it takes to get to that level.

On the reason why celebrities are likely to be imitated, Wilson (2009) attributes this to Bandura's social learning theory (1986), how "humans learn about the world through observing the behaviour of others. He adds that "by watching the effects of certain behaviours, and examining personal responses, people decide on their own values about behaviour. Logically, people are likely to imitate the behaviour which they associate with success or successful people" (Wilson, 2009).

According to the article "Celebrities bad influence on children" the author states that these celebrities "have a positive effect on our lives; they value success, relationships, seeking to find young talents, looking good, giving to the poor and a high self-esteem." Also in that article, it was observed that celebrities can damage children's education. According to the respondents which were the teachers, pupils' obsession with footballers, pop stars and actors are affecting their progress in school as well as limiting their career aspirations."

"In a survey for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, (ATL), also cited in the above article, 60% of the 304 teachers quizzed said their pupils most aspired to be David Beckham. More than one-third said the pupils' motivation to become famous is only for the sake of being famous."

The article also said "celebrities could raise pupils' aspirations and ambitions for the future, adding however that, youths are to be careful as celebrity status is not available to everyone. Also "they do not understand the hard work it takes to achieve such status and do not think it is important to be actively engaged in school work as education is not needed for a celebrity status".

The study also pointed out some effects of celebrity influence on youths; "they said too many pupils believed academic success was 'unnecessary' because they thought they

would be able to make their fame and fortune quite easily on a reality TV show.” “They believe they are much more likely to achieve financial well-being through having a celebrity status, than through progression to higher education and a ‘proper’ career”.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families also cited in the article said “While the worst excesses of celebrity culture may lend themselves to lurid headlines, it is worth remembering that there are many more celebrities who set a good example on a local and national level.” They help in schools and community projects, promote healthy lifestyles, take part in anti-drug campaigns and encourage children to stay on in education and to stay safe.”

CELEBRITIES AND YOUTH CAREER

The Webster’s Third New International Dictionary defines career as “a profession for which one undergoes special training and which is undertaken as a permanent calling. It is also an occupation or profession engaged in as a life work.”

Celebrities motivate youths to aspire to be successful. They have a strong desire to be like the stars they see on the TV, read or hear about. Celebrities propel some youths to pursue activities like acting, sports, writing, modelling, or even doing some business. Celebrity attachments directly and indirectly affect people’s behaviour and feelings about themselves. When you see a successful person and you admire that person, you could make up your mind to be like that person or be a success in another area.

Generally youths look up to celebrities as a perfect example of successful people and in that way in try to attain perfectionism, have a desire to conform to the goings-on and avoid conflict, and also have a need for control.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study made use of the descriptive survey research method. Two thousand, five hundred National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, that is, Nigerian youths who have completed a period of study in a tertiary institution for a university degree (BA/BSC) or a Higher National Diploma (HND) and are engaged in the one year compulsory national service as required by the federal government of Nigeria serving in Ogun state in the Batch A of the 2011/2012 academic session constituted the population of the study. Corps members were chosen based on the assumption that they are at the stage of taking a final decision on what area they want to go in life. The sample size was made up of 250 corps members who were served with copies of the questionnaire being the instrument for data collection. A retrieval rate of 192 copies of the questionnaire was recorded based on which, analysis and discussion took place.

Discussion was based on three research questions which guided the study namely:

1. Do Nigerian youths endorse the celebrities they meet in magazine features?
2. What kind of celebrities do Nigerian youths admire most?
3. Can magazine celebrity features influence the career aspirations of Nigerian youths?

Table 1: Geo-political zone of the respondents

Geo-political zone	Number of respondents
NORTH EAST	10 (5.21)
NORTH WEST	10 (5.21)
NORTH-CENTRAL	19 (9.9)
SOUTH-WEST	90 (46.9)
SOUTH-EAST	37 (19.3)
SOUTH-SOUTH	26 (13.5)

Table 1 shows the geo-political zones of the respondents. The table reveals that 46.9% (90) of the respondents are from the South-West, 19.3% (37) are from the South-East, 13.5% (26) are from the South-South, 9.9% (19) are from the North-Central and 5.21% (10) are from the North-East and North-West respectively. Every one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria is represented in this research. Although this is a pilot study, the researchers consider the national representation adequate for drawing inferences on the attitude of Nigerian youths towards magazine celebrity features.

Table 2: Respondents that enjoy reading about magazine celebrities

Response	Number of respondents
YES	176 (91.7)
NO	16 (8.3)
Total	192 (100)

Table 2 shows the rate at which the respondents enjoy reading about magazine celebrities. Out of the 192 respondents, 91.7% (176) said that they like to read about these personalities as opposed to an insignificant 8.3% (16) who are indifferent.

Table 3: Respondents' approval of magazine celebrities as successful people

Response	Number of respondents
YES	169 (88.0)
NO	23 (11.9)
Total	192 (100)

Besides being interested in reading about these celebrities, the researchers also investigated the approval rate of the celebrities as successful personalities. From the data in Table 2, 88% (169) of the respondents said that they consider the personalities they read about as successful while 11.9% (23) said that they do not consider these celebrities as successful.

Table 4: Respondents that admire lifestyle of celebrities

Response	Number of respondents
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YES	148 (77.1)
NO	44 (22.9)
Total	192 (100)

148 (77.1) respondents said they admire the lifestyle of the personalities they read about while 44 (22.9) respondents said No that they don't admire the lifestyle of these personalities.

The data in tables 3 and 4 helped to provide the answer to the first research question which sought find out if Nigerian youths endorse the celebrities they encounter in magazine features. Indeed, they do. This is authenticated with 88% approval rate (see Table 3) and 77% admiration rate (see Table 4). Based on these data, Research Question One is given an affirmative answer that Nigerian youths actually endorse the celebrities they meet in magazine features.

Table 5: Types of Celebrities Nigerian Youths admire

Types	Number of respondents /Ranking					Total
	1 (lowest)	2	3	4	5 (highest)	
Sports Stars	29 (15.1)	35 (18.2)	41 (21.4)	27 (14.1)	60 (31.3)	192
Movie Stars	24 (12.5)	26 (13.5)	51 (26.6)	58 (30.2)	33 (17.2)	192
Music Stars	25 (13)	24 (12.5)	43 (22.4)	55 (28.6)	45 (23.4)	192
Tele-Evangelists	31 (16.1)	21 (10.9)	37 (19.3)	40 (20.8)	63 (32.8)	192
Broadcasters	24 (12.5)	37 (19.3)	40 (20.8)	52 (27.1)	39 (20.3)	192
Journalists	28 (14.6)	31 (16.1)	51 (26.6)	45 (23.4)	37 (19.3)	192
Business Moguls	19 (9.9)	17 (8.9)	41 (21.4)	38 (19.8)	77 (40.1)	192
Social Critics	30 (15.6)	40 (20.8)	43 (22.4)	39 (20.3)	40 (20.8)	192
Human Rights Activists	19 (9.9)	25 (13)	39 (20.3)	40 (20.8)	69 (35.9)	192
Authors	13 (6.8)	22 (11.5)	34 (17.7)	54 (28.1)	69 (35.9)	192
Politicians	79 (41.1)	40 (20.8)	23 (12)	14 (7.3)	36 (18.8)	192

Table 5 shows the types of celebrities that Nigerian youths admire. In a ranking order with 5 as the highest rank, the data in the table reveals that the most admired personalities are Business Moguls with 40.1% (77) admiration rate. The next group are Human Rights Activists and Authors which scores 35.9% (69). This is followed by Tele-Evangelists

with 32.8% (63), then Sports Stars with 60 (31.3). Music stars had 45 (23.4) points then Social Critics with 40 (20.8), Broadcasters and Journalists had 20.3% (39) and 19.3% (37) respectively. Politicians and Movie Stars followed with 18.8 % (36) and 17.2% (33) respectively.

The data in this table provided answer to Research Question Two which sought to determine the kind of celebrities that Nigerian youths admire. Table 9 shows that the personality type most admired by Nigerian youths is business celebrity, tagged “Business moguls”. The next group falls within the class of Human Rights Activists and Authors while the third and fourth highest groups fall within the classes of politicians and movie stars respectively.

This finding however differs from the findings of Cyril de Run, Butt and Yen Nee (2010) and two earlier works by Donahue, (2002), and Bush and Martin (2000). Whereas, the findings in these studies reveal that the youths that they studied are attracted to celebrities in the sports stars category, the present study however, shows that Nigerian youths are more drawn to celebrities in the business category.

Table 6: Respondents who desire to be like the celebrities

Responses	Number of respondents
YES	152 (79.2)
NO	40 (20.8)
Total	192 (100)

Table 6 provides data on the personal attraction of the respondents to the celebrities. The emphasis is on the desire of the respondents to be like the celebrities. Data in the table shows that 79.2% (152) of the respondents said that they desire to be like magazine celebrities.

Table 7: Respondents who make efforts to be like the celebrities

Responses	Number of respondents
YES	141 (73.4)
NO	51 (26.6)
Total	192 (100)

Table 7 reinforces the data in Table 6 regarding the personal attraction of the respondents to the celebrities. As a way of probing deeper into this personal attraction, Table 7 provides data on whether the respondents actually make efforts to be like the celebrities. The data reveals that 73.4% (141) of the respondents indeed do so.

Data in Tables 6 and 7 provide answer to Research Question Three which sought to determine if indeed, the celebrities can influence the choice of career and aspirations of Nigerian youths. With 79.2% (152) of the respondents indicating their desire to be like the magazine celebrities and 73.4% actually making efforts to be like the celebrities, the answer is obvious. Magazine celebrity features indeed have strong pull on Nigeria youths. They have the capacity to influence the career aspirations of Nigerian youths.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings revealed that youths are more influenced by a desire to flow with the goings-on around them especially with what they see in the media. It was discovered that Nigerian youth admire and also approve of celebrities; they also consider magazine celebrities as successful people. This research also shows that the celebrities that most Nigerian youths admire are Business Moguls. This is however different from the findings of some researchers as they assert that sports stars are recognized as favorite celebrity role models for most young individuals.

Based on the findings of this study, reporters are to be careful when writing about important personalities or celebrities because most of them have effects on the people who read them especially young people. This means that they are to introduce a balance in the categories of celebrities they feature; they should feature celebrities from different fields of endeavour. While carrying out their duties of reporting newsmakers, the media should be careful not to celebrate negative aspects of a personality's life. In print publications especially soft sell magazines, there are celebrity corners most times called celebrity gist or celebrity gossip; in this section there are reports on celebrities most times negative ones. On the foreign scene, the reporters have stories showing celebrities who were caught drunk-driving and eventually sent to a rehabilitation centre. In these portrayals, the negative aspects of the celebrities are often given more prominence. In doing this, the media are unwittingly projecting vices. This, probably, may be because, the media see this as a way of projecting celebrities, but it could have negative effects on an unsuspecting youth.

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