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The Celebrity Entrepreneur on Television: Profile, Politics and Power

Abstract: This article examines the rise of the ‘celebrity entrepreneur’ on television through the emergence of the ‘business entertainment format’ and considers the ways in which regular television exposure can be converted into wider media and political capital. Within television studies there has been a preoccupation in recent years with how lifestyle and reality formats work to transform ‘ordinary’ people into celebrities. As a result, the contribution of vocationally skilled business professionals to factual entertainment programming has gone almost unnoticed. This article begins by looking at the construction of entrepreneurs as different types of television personalities as well as how discourses of work, skill and knowledge function in business shows. It then outlines how entrepreneurs can utilize their newly acquired televisual skills to cultivate a wider media profile and secure various forms of political access and influence. Integral to this is the centrality of public relations and media management agencies in shaping media discourses and developing the individual as a ‘brand identity’ that can be used to endorse a range of products or ideas. In turn, policy makers and politicians have attempted to mobilize the media profile of celebrity entrepreneurs in an attempt to reach out and connect with the public on business and enterprise-related issues.

Keywords: Business celebrity; TV personality; media and political capital; public relations industry; *Dragons’ Den*

Business figures are not newcomers to the game of celebrity . . . they helped make up the rules of the game in the first place.

(Guthey *et al.* 2009, p. 8)

We had gone from Dragons to demons. We'd become luvvies and were no longer successful business people who happened to be making a TV show, but were also TV celebs.

(Theo Paphitis 2009, *Enter the Dragon*, p. 235)

Introduction

In their analysis of the relationship between business celebrity and the celebrity business, Guthey *et al.* (2009) argue that rather than being another area of society that has become influenced by celebrity culture, business celebrity has actually been integral to its rise. This is because the development of the American commercial public relations industry, that supports, constructs and helps maintain the celebrity industries, initially grew out of the concerns of big business regarding adverse media coverage administered to key business figures such as John D. Rockefeller in the early part of the twentieth century (Guthey *et al.* 2009, pp. 5-6). Explaining the central role played by what they term 'business culture intermediaries' in 'the manufactured co-production of business celebrities' (2009, p. 4), Guthey *et al.* suggest that this is crucial in understanding the position of business figures in contemporary public and media discourse. The 'business culture intermediaries' cited in their work include public relations agencies, journalists, editors and photographers, a list to which we would also add television companies, executives and broadcasters.

Since the inception of the medium, business celebrities have always appeared on or been discussed within the arena of television news and current affairs programming to some extent, either due to their involvement in topical business

issues or in an attempt to extend their own media profile. However the recent proliferation of factual entertainment formats focusing on business, such as *The Apprentice* (BBC2, 2005-6; BBC1, 2007-), *Dragons' Den* (BBC2, 2005-), *Mary Queen of Shops* (BBC2, 2007-), *Property Ladder* (Channel 4, 2001-) and *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* (Channel 4, 2004-), has led to business professionals, or rather self-styled 'entrepreneurs' in particular (1), contributing to these new types of programmes in other ways, namely as 'experts', 'mentors' and 'judges' who offer their skill and knowledge of a specific sector (and in some cases financial investment) to ordinary people who take part as subjects or contestants. These programmes have gone almost unnoticed by television scholars in recent years as a focus has instead been placed primarily on the rise of lifestyle and reality formats and the way in which they transform ordinary people into celebrities 'without the requisite association with work' (Marshall 1997, p. ix).

Yet, business entertainment formats have much to tell us not only about contemporary forms of business celebrity but also the construction of different types of television personalities and celebrity experts as well as how discourses of work, skill and knowledge function within these shows. The latter is an area that Bennett and Holmes (2010, p. 67) call for greater attention to be paid within factual television studies and while discourses of work and labour are important to lifestyle and reality programming, we believe that the analysis of the business entertainment format offers up particularly relevant insights on this subject along with broader issues surrounding authenticity, power and celebrity. Moreover, while Guthey *et al.* (2009) discuss the rise of celebrity management gurus and CEOs from the perspective of management and organizational studies, they do not discuss celebrity entrepreneurs or the role of television programming in the celebrity industries in any detail. Thus, our focus on

celebrity entrepreneurs and the business entertainment format again fills a gap in our knowledge regarding their contribution to the celebrity landscape.

In this article we are interested in examining initially the rise of the celebrity entrepreneur on British television and secondly the manner through which these entrepreneurs translate their newly acquired media capital into political access and influence. In so doing we will consider what Marshall (1997) terms the ‘celebrity-commodity’ and begin to map out the ‘production, trade, marketing or political economy of the structures which manufacture this commodity’ (Turner 2010, p. 15); an aspect that Turner believes is acutely lacking from current academic approaches to celebrity studies (2).

The Television Entrepreneur and Celebrity

The term ‘television personality’ (Langer 1981; in Marshall 2006) has long been used within film and television studies to distinguish the type of fame granted to those who appear on the small screen from the theory of film ‘stardom’ first put forward by Richard Dyer (1979); with both being considered to be different from that of ‘celebrity’ (Geraghty 2000). While one of the concerns of this article is how entrepreneurs that appear on television go on to become wider media celebrities, we first want to look at some of the problems related to the term television personality when applied to the business entertainment format. As Lury (1995, p. 117) has noted, television studies has often struggled with analyzing television performance, with the categories of personality (those who appear in factual programming) and actor (those who appear in fiction) often being entangled; although it is the case that ‘the personality is also always in some sense “acting”’ (ibid). Bennett (2008, p. 34) concurs by suggesting that many scholars simply ‘conflate the wide variety of

performers on television into one category: the television personality'. However, he also highlights a more narrow understanding that posits the TV personality as those performers within the factual arena that essentially play themselves, 'making little distinction between onscreen and private personas: Jamie Oliver as "Jamie Oliver", for instance' (Bennett 2008, p. 35).

This category includes everything from light entertainment performers to daytime magazine presenters, gameshow hosts, news anchors and the range of experts who appear on lifestyle programming covering cookery, gardening, fashion and interior design. It is this latter category that has received the most attention within television studies in recent years following what Brunsdon (2003) terms the 'lifestyling of British television' from the 1990s onwards (see also Brunsdon *et al.* 2001). The focus here has primarily been on various notions of the ordinary, including the 'ordinari-nization' of television itself (Brunsdon *et al.* 2001, p. 53), the transformation of ordinary people through makeover strategies (Lewis 2008; Weber 2009; Ouellette and Hay 2009) and the construction of the TV personality or expert as 'ordinary/extraordinary' so as to position them as 'just like' the audience despite exhibiting certain levels of knowledge, control and power (Bonner 2003). Bennett (2008, p. 36) takes this further by distinguishing between *televisually* skilled and *vocationally* skilled performers and suggesting that those in possession of some sort of skill related to their professional status in a specific field have become increasingly visible on British television screens, particularly as programme presenters. While such skills validate their appearance on television and give credibility to their authenticity of character (something that is important within the immediate and intimate world of television), vocationally skilled performers nevertheless also have to master certain

televisual skills if they are to secure longevity onscreen and acquire wider fame (Bennett and Holmes 2010, p. 72).

The entrepreneur as presenter/expert

The category of vocationally skilled performer is thus central to the appearance of entrepreneurs as onscreen experts but, again, this consists of a diverse group of roles and performance styles. Discussing the aforementioned Jamie Oliver, De Solier (2005, in Powell and Prasad 2010, p. 119) explains how the celebrity chef (who is often termed an entrepreneur by the British media due to his various business interests) portrays in his cookery programmes a 'leisure identity' as opposed to a 'professional identity' by reconfiguring cooking not as 'domestic chore' or 'professional labour' but as primarily a leisure activity. It can be argued that Oliver's onscreen identity has since changed due to his role in political campaigning shows such as *Jamie's School Dinners* (Channel 4, 2005) and *Jamie's Ministry of Food* (Channel 4, 2008). However, entrepreneurs portraying a 'leisure identity' is certainly not the case in business entertainment formats, which often seem to have been subsumed within the realm of lifestyle and reality programming by the academy despite their differences in focus.

In *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, for example, another celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay imparts his professional skills within the kitchen and draws on his reputation as a successful restaurateur to act as troubleshooter to failing restaurants around the country. In this sense, Ramsay's expertise are very much validated by his professional off-screen status and, while it can be argued that he is playing an 'exaggerated' version of himself for the cameras, it is his ability to blend his professional identity with a televisually skilled performance (that consists both of direct address to camera

and a distinctively aggressive and confrontational performance style) that has contributed to the long-running success of the series.

Gordon Ramsay has the dual-role of both presenter and business expert in *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* and this is a similar device employed in other troubleshooter-type formats such as *Mary Queen of Shops*, which sees retail expert Mary Portas attempt to turn round struggling fashion boutiques in the face of increasing competition from high-profile retail chains (3). Sarah Beeny of Channel 4's *Property Ladder*, on the other hand, functions slightly differently as she adopts more of a mentoring role to the would-be property developers who appear on the show, remaining in control of the situation in her presenter guise but exhibiting a much less confrontational style when imparting advice to the ordinary people taking part (who indeed regularly ignore her well-informed suggestions). By directly addressing the camera and, by extension, the audience at home, the television viewer is encouraged to identify with the presenter/expert in these programmes, a position that is supported due to the way in which their credibility is validated by their offscreen success within their respective restaurant, retail and property businesses. In this sense, they may be playing a heightened version of themselves on television, but they are nevertheless positioned as being authentic characters, or rather 'just-as-they-are' in real life, in relation to their business skills and knowledge.

The entrepreneur as judge/investor

Just as the troubleshooter-format is only one type of business entertainment programme, not all entrepreneurs who appear on television assume the dual presenter/expert role. For example, Alan Sugar acts as a judge on *The Apprentice*, a reality gameshow in which he becomes the real-life employer of the winning

contestant. Likewise the ‘dragons’ of *Dragon’s Den* similarly make judgements regarding the quality of pitches and potential business opportunities put forward by aspiring entrepreneurs in the den, although in this case they offer real-life financial investment rather than a one-year contract to those who succeed. In neither instance do the entrepreneurs assume the role of presenter or regularly address the camera and the audience at home. Instead *The Apprentice* features a voiceover while the televisually skilled presenter Evan Davis acts as an intermediary in *Dragons’ Den*.

Through television’s system of ‘delegated looking’ (Bennett and Holmes 2010, p. 74) however, the viewer is regularly aligned with the viewpoint of Sugar and the ‘dragons’ and thus encouraged to draw on the skills, knowledge and expertise put forward by these entrepreneurs before going on to judge the contestants and participants accordingly. It is also the case that these figures perform a certain ‘nasty’ role that has become appealing to audiences schooled in reality TV and which is indicative of the televisual skills they have acquired. However this does not necessarily make them appear inauthentic, as their ruthlessness is again legitimized by their offscreen achievements within the demanding world of business.

Yet, while the public and private personas of these television entrepreneurs are presented as being almost indistinguishable, the identification process established between the audience and such personalities becomes more problematic. For example, as Bennett and Holmes (2010, p. 71) note, ‘television’s discourse of glamour allows its personalities to function as figures of identification and “reachable” ideals of wealth, extravagance and glamour’ without breaching the ‘boundaries of a middle-class taste culture of the period’. This notion of ‘reachable’ wealth is difficult to establish with prosperous entrepreneurs in general, not to mention those whose

appearances on television have subjected them to the celebrification process and the subsequent lifestyle that accompanies it.

Again, it is important to point out that this occurs on different levels, so that nationally-recognizable figures like Portas and Beeny become easier to identify with than Ramsay, who has achieved transnational fame as both a Michelin-starred chef and television personality on both sides of the Atlantic. Likewise, those experts who directly address the camera are able to establish a stronger rapport with the audience than those who sit solely in judgment of others due to their wealth and achievements. Indeed the opening sequence of *Dragon's Den* was toned down during the 2009 recession as images of the millionaire 'dragons' driving top-of-the-range cars, flying in private jets and relaxing aboard luxury yachts was no longer deemed appropriate by the BBC (interview with Dominic Bird, Executive Producer of *Dragons' Den*, 27 March 2009).

There is therefore a certain masking involved or disavowal in relation to the financial and cultural capital acquired by television entrepreneurs offscreen and their onscreen personas; although prior to the recession viewers were perhaps encouraged to *aspire* to be like these figures rather than *identify* with them per se. One way of negotiating this is by invoking a 'rags to riches' narrative that is both well-established within business reporting (Guthey *et al.* 2009) and easily recognizable to the audience. In this sense, an emphasis is placed on the way in which celebrity entrepreneurs have overcome some sort of adversity, typically in terms of class, background or lack of academic ability, to achieve wealth and success through sheer hard work. This narrative is then presented as something that is potentially 'reachable' to the television-viewing masses.

Television as an entry point to wider 'celebrification'

This is a short description of how these entrepreneurs function on business entertainment formats through the use of both their vocational and televisual skills. But how does this relate to their wider business or media celebrity? With the exception of Alan Sugar, who has long satisfied Guthey *et al.*'s (2009) description of a 'business celebrity' due to a high media profile gained through PR stunts surrounding his Amstrad business in the 1980s and his time spent throughout the 1990s as Chairman of British football club Tottenham Hotspur, television programming has served as an entry point for each of these entrepreneurs into the media landscape and thus the broader public consciousness.

While they have undoubtedly achieved a certain level of success within their own sectors, it is not the case that they have been feted by their peers for their exceptional skillset and knowledge or have reached the upper echelons of the international business world. Indeed, there is an argument that suggests if these individuals were at the top of their game business-wise then their time and energy would be devoted to their offscreen projects rather than television programming. Instead, what they have demonstrated is the potential to cultivate first a successful televisual image and then wider media profile that can be exploited by cultural intermediaries into an individual brand, selling the aforementioned television programmes along with business books, biographies, public speaking engagements and even political ideas. This then feeds into their own business interests at the same time as establishing them as a celebrity in which their public and private personas are increasingly blurred. It is this ability to function as a 'celebrity-commodity' (Marshall 1997) that we will now go on to consider, specifically in relation to converting television status into a wider media brand.

Television, Media Profile and Public Relations

When the former industrialist Sir John Harvey-Jones finished filming the first series of *Troubleshooter* for BBC television in 1990, he was ill prepared for the impact it would have on his life. Having retired from mainstream business life he envisaged the BBC series as being a useful vehicle for bringing his passion – highlighting the importance of manufacturing to the British economy – to the wider public. But its success led him to start yet another career as a celebrity businessman and troubleshooting business guru. He noted how letters and phone calls flooded in with requests for advice and help with regard to running a small business, suggesting to him that the necessary support for this sector of the economy was sadly lacking (Harvey-Jones 1992).

Robert Thirkell, the creator and producer of *Troubleshooter* who is recognized in the UK television industry as the person who invented the ‘business entertainment format’, suggests that some focus on celebrity has always been associated with television:

You always need to break through with a star presenter or a star name or a star something. So in *Troubleshooter* we specifically looked at companies like Morgan Cars that people knew about, in a way you could say they were ‘celebrity businesses’. We were very careful to do that. And we built Sir John up into being a sort of celebrity at the time, didn’t we? (interview with authors, 13 March 2009).

Harvey-Jones was however a star in a very different media age. Beyond news and current affairs, business and business people featured little on British television, other than as comedic or dramatic characters in situation comedies or popular fictional

dramas (Lichter *et al.* 1994; Williams 2004). The celebrity infrastructure that exists today - underpinned by numerous media outlets all looking for content and a public relations industry closely linked to journalism – had not yet developed into the commercial network we now recognize. Nor was there the same interest in business personalities that has characterized broader media coverage of business in the last decade or so (Boyle and Magor, 2008).

It was newspapers in particular that were to play a key role in both reflecting and reinforcing an increasing interest in money and financial matters that was seen to exist amongst readers and consumers. Indeed, the print sector during this time saw a massive increase in the space devoted to personal and professional finance and, from shares and investments to consumer rights, coverage of money and business expanded across both the tabloid and broadsheet sectors of the press. These changes in attitude towards notions of wealth creation and the entrepreneurs so feted by the government was to an extent reflected in the shifting attitudes of key media outlets to the more general reporting of business and the financial world. What we are thus suggesting is that the rise of the celebrity entrepreneur has its roots in a deeper political and economic shift in UK culture in which certain neo-liberal assumptions become deeply rooted in the broader political culture (Jenkins 2007).

Brand building

As Guthey *et al.* (2009) convincingly argue, public relations (PR) is integral in understanding the narrative of corporate culture more generally and also in explaining what Wernick (1991) has called the age of ‘promotional culture’. Certainly the rise of the celebrity entrepreneur has been underpinned by the centrality of public relations and media management agencies in shaping media discourses and developing the

individual as a 'brand identity'. Again, it is worth noting that this isn't a new process. Miller and Dinan (2008) document the rise of business and corporate PR influence on both media and public policy from its professional origins in the US, Britain and Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. They also note how in the last few decades, the UK has seen an explosion in PR and lobbying agencies all shaping public, political and media agendas during a period of massive extension in media provision and outlets. They, along with others (Davies 2008; Hargreaves 2003), are critical of the extent to which journalism has generally become symbiotically meshed with public relations and wider media management strategy. It is this combination of expanded 24/7 media and public relations influence that has facilitated and helped sustain the celebrity industry that has evolved in recent years.

One of the most high profile entrepreneurs within the UK over the last thirty years has been Sir Richard Branson, who sets aside up to 25% of his time solely for public relations purposes (Guthey *et al.* 2009, p. 2). Indeed many entrepreneurs regularly cite Branson as a role model. For those in the deregulated airline business, such as EasyJet founder Stelios Haji-Ioannou or Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary, Branson and his strategic use of media management along with a broader PR infrastructure in building the Virgin brand over a number of decades have provided key elements in relation to the business model they have adopted when creating their own respective brands. At the core of this has been associating one key individual with the public-facing image of the company.

Using the media to help create a brand identity or promote business interests has a long history across British popular culture. Sir Richard Branson has assiduously used media influence and public relations to establish his myriad businesses and in so

doing has himself become synonymous with the Virgin brand. At one level his strategy has been clear:

Publicity is absolutely critical. [] You have to be willing to use yourself, as well as your advertising budget, to get your brand on the map. A good PR story is infinitely more effective than a full-page ad, and a damn sight cheaper (Branson 2008, p. 63).

For others such as Bower (2008), the Virgin publicity machine has also worked hard throughout Branson's career to avoid or deflect difficult questions regarding some of his business activities and as a result his public profile and popularity remains high.

Into the Dragons Den . . .

The rise in popularity of programmes such as *Dragons' Den* has also offered another vehicle through which to establish a media profile. For instance, while each of the 'dragons' to contribute to the series over the years have had previous business careers (as without this they lack the credibility that is vital to their image on the show), none had any particular public or political profile. This quickly changed following their involvement in the BBC series, although this is in part dependent on their own individual interests in developing this aspect of their business identity.

Rachel Elnaugh was the first female entrepreneur to appear on *Dragons' Den*, a situation that afforded her a certain cachet within the public's consciousness. However, during filming of the second series her business Red Letter Days ran into serious financial trouble and was eventually sold to her fellow 'dragons' Theo Paphitis and Peter Jones. Following her appearance on the BBC programme and demise of her company, she subsequently wrote a book (Elnaugh 2009) in which she interviewed entrepreneurs about the role that failure has played in their business

careers. She also recognized the key role that appearing on television has played in her ongoing career. For example, in a similar manner to Harvey-Jones, Elnaugh was deluged from the moment the show was broadcast with emails from people wanting her opinion, advice and time with regard to business issues. She thus found herself becoming a 'celebrity entrepreneur' and, even with the collapse of her company, this profile allowed her to develop a career through mentoring, public speaking and endorsements that without her television status would simply not have evolved.

Certainly the ability to build a media career has been one of the advantages for many of the entrepreneurs who have appeared on business television programming. From *Dragons' Den* alone this includes Duncan Bannatyne's various TV appearances (*Fortune: Million Pound Giveaway*, ITV, 2007; *Beat the Bank*, BBC2, 2008; *Bannatyne Takes on Tobacco*, BBC2, 2008; *Out of the Frying Pan*, BBC2, 2010 and *Duncan Bannatyne's Seaside Rescue*, Virgin 1, 2010) through to Peter Jones creating his own eponymously named television company and appearing in a range of television ad campaigns for companies such as BT and moneysupermarket.com.

For Dominic Bird, Executive Producer of *Dragons' Den*, the combination of compelling content, the right format and a sprinkling of celebrity culture are what enables the show to connect with its younger audience:

There is now a sense that there is a younger generation who see being a dragon or being a business person as a cool thing to do. [] I am sure this is related to being on TV, the same way that often people aspire to the celebrity side of life. Thus the glamour of it being on TV has made it accessible to those people, and you can't argue that celebrity isn't massively powerful [] I mean, in the same way, why would ad agencies spend so much money on having celebrities front their campaigns? It's a

powerful thing. But celebrities haven't driven *Dragon's Den*, the format is bigger than the individuals (interview with authors, 27 March 2009).

When the latest 'dragon' James Caan, head of private equity firm Hamilton Bradshaw, joined the programme in 2007 he was unprepared for the impact his appearance would have on his personal and professional profile. Initially contacted through a talent scout who recruits for television companies, Caan (2009, p. 356) has seen his television profile pull him into media and political circles with lightening speed:

Appearing on *Dragons' Den* has had an impact on my business as well as my personal life. I now get more invitations to many more events, parties and charity fundraisers, as well as requests to offer my opinion on things like *Newsnight*, *Sky News* and *Bloomberg*. I am asked to talk about the economy or comment on changes to the trading environment, but sometimes I get asked my opinion on whatever is in the headlines. During one interview I was even asked what impact the Indonesian elections would have on the economy. I had to stop myself saying live on air: *What Indonesian elections?*

Caan has also developed good contacts with the New Labour government and Gordon Brown in particular on the back of his increased media profile. In 2009, he was invited by Lord Mandelson to become Co-Chair of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills' (BIS) Ethnic Minority Task Force, part of whose remit it is to ensure that black and minority ethnic entrepreneurs have access to appropriate business support.

Of course, along with the development of a television profile and burgeoning political influence, each of the 'dragons' have also been pursued by a publishing

industry keen for them to produce the almost obligatory biography or ‘how to succeed in business’ book documenting their rise to dominance within the business world. It is here again that the ‘rags to riches’ narrative is reiterated and celebrity entrepreneurs are positioned as viable role models for the wider public.

PR management and social media

For most of the ‘dragons’, their media profile is controlled by key public relations agencies. For Duncan Bannatyne it is Phil Hall Associates (PHA) run by the eponymous former editor of the *News of the World*. PHA specializes in reputation management and celebrity PR and includes other celebrity entrepreneurs such as Gordon Ramsay among its clients. Peter Jones retains Max Clifford Associates (MCA), one of the most high profile celebrity PR agencies in the UK. MCA also work with television entrepreneurs such as Simon Cowell (*X Factor*; *Britain’s Got Talent*) who co-produced *American Inventor* (through his company SyCo Ltd) with Peter Jones Television for ABC in 2006. Indeed Jones recalls how when he had the idea for the programme it was to Clifford he brought the proposal to allow him to pass it to Cowell (Jones 2007, p. 231).

Alan Sugar of *The Apprentice* uses Frank PR to assist in his image management, a leading UK company that seeks to work with both household-names and small entrepreneurial start-ups (an ethos in keeping with Sugar’s own commitment to fostering enterprise and encouraging apprenticeships). A core element in this circuit of promotion is the ability to gain profile across a range of media platforms and outlets. For previous winners and contestants of *The Apprentice*, many of whom have since set up their own businesses, building a public persona through business-to-business media has been important. A number, including the winner of

the first series Tim Campbell, use the PR agency Taylor Herring Public Relations who work with Talkback Thames and the BBC on the programme and have a Celebrity PR division. As a result, television entrepreneurs are regularly featured in *Business Sense*, the largest circulation business magazine in the UK, with Campbell appearing on the cover of the Spring 2010 edition as the UK government's new social enterprise ambassador. In short, by appearing on television and through careful PR management, these entrepreneurs now have a public platform that was denied them previously no matter how successful and wealthy they may have been.

While PR companies act as cultural intermediaries that seek to extend the media profile and individual brands of their various clients at the same time as remaining largely invisible from public view, there has also been a new development in what Marshall (2010) terms the 'promotion and presentation of the self' through the use of social media. As a number of scholars have sought to explain (Horton and Wohl 1956; Tolson 2001; Drake and Miah 2010), the relationships established by celebrities and their audiences using 'old' media such as television has tended to be based on what is best described as 'para-social engagement'.

This involves the recognition of the difficulties involved in celebrities communicating individually with members of the mass audience and thus instead focuses primarily on a one-way flow of communication in which viewers are encouraged to develop 'real but imagined relationships' with celebrities in the public sphere (Tolson 2001, p. 451). However, this has begun to change recently in two ways. First, the development of reality TV has created feedback mechanisms through voting systems for example, which Drake and Miah (2010, p. 62) describe as 'a popular reflexive device allowing audiences to play and interact within the boundaries of the format'. Second, the emergence of social networking websites has allowed

celebrities to begin to interact more directly with their audience (although it is often the case that Facebook and Twitter sites are also administered by PR companies as part of a wider management strategy).

For those celebrities who do assume control of their online profile however, social media allows them to present a ‘public private self’ (Marshall 2010, p. 44) that provides further exposure and access to their individual lives. Moreover, Marshall (2010, p. 45) also explains that ‘the currency of Twitter is that it is much more connected to mobile delivery and thus gives the sensation of immediacy’. Establishing a sense of immediacy is something that television has previously sought to do through the aforementioned use of direct address to camera. But social networking provides added interactive and instantaneous elements by allowing other users to comment and post messages and by revealing the location of the celebrity or the types of activities they are engaged in at any given time. This helps create ‘new forms of mediated intimacy between celebrity performers and their publics’ (Drake and Miah 2010, p. 62) that can either work to circumvent or enhance more traditional PR routes.

It is the case that each of the television entrepreneurs discussed in this article have an online Twitter profile, and indeed it is here that they often identify themselves as entrepreneurs and TV personalities rather than as business people per se. While the value of this type of social networking in terms of extending business brands and garnering influence and power is yet to be determined, it can be argued that online profiles do add to the celebrification process and bestow further cultural capital on those who take part. In the next section of the article, we want to consider the ways in which these various types of media and cultural capital can be converted into broader forms of political capital within the policy arena.

Converting Media Capital into Political Capital

In their typology of business celebrities, Guthey *at al.* (2009, p. 13) identify the categories of celebrity entrepreneurs, celebrity business leaders/CEOs and celebrity management gurus, with their research focusing on the latter of these two. They also concentrate primarily on the US media and cultural industries, while at the same time recognizing the global nature of the circuits of communication that help sustain these celebrity cultures. Our focus in this instance has been on the celebrity entrepreneur and the UK television and media industries. In particular, this section of the article is interested in understanding the role played by key business celebrities in converting media capital into various forms of political capital, something that we have briefly touched on in relation to James Caan. Davis and Seymour (forthcoming) argue that:

As societies become more ‘mediated’ so the elevation of public figures is increasingly linked to their ability to generate a positive public profile through the mass media. Politicians, artists, film stars, authors and others each gain professional status, in part according to how consumer-citizens actively respond to media representations of them.

To this list we would add business people and entrepreneurs who, through initial television exposure, accumulate various forms of media capital that bring them to the attention of policy makers and politicians. By this we mean the ways in which politicians attempt to mobilize the public profile of certain business celebrities and pull them into the policy arena, either as consultants and policy shapers, or as advocates for governmental policy often in the field of enterprise and business.

Underpinning this symbiotic relationship is a number of key assumptions (which may or may not have actual merit). One of these is that politicians appear to believe that these individuals will both raise the media profile of their initiatives and

influence the public and various stakeholders in society in a manner which politicians appear incapable of doing themselves.

Business Advisors and Policy Networks

Of course the role of business people advising government or being pulled into the rarefied networks of policy formation is not new. However, traditionally these advisory positions have been held by very senior executives, such as the involvement with the Conservative government of Lord Hanson (The Hanson Group) and Lord King (British Airways) during the 1980s. While these senior executives still form part of the advisory network of government through bodies such as the Business Council of Britain, in addition to this group there is another crop of business people operating within the orbit of government and policy circles that have in common a high media profile, largely created through television. James Harding, then City Editor and now editor of *The Times* told us that:

None of the people who appear on television are significant business people. Some are great ambassadors for business and some are lousy, but most of them are TV personalities, and hats off to them, that is a difficult thing to do. But they are not running British Airways (interview with authors, 15 March 2007).

In other words while their access to the political elite has in part been secured by their business background, it has been significantly enhanced by their television and associated media profile.

When Sir Alan Sugar became Lord Sugar and an (unpaid) advisor to Lord Mandelson at the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2009, it was at a time when it was widely acknowledged that his business profile had been in

relative decline for a number of years but his public profile, through the BBC version of *The Apprentice*, had never been higher. Daisy Goodwin, former executive producer of *The Apprentice* for Talkback Thames, notes:

Interestingly [Sugar] is the man who has gone from being a business figure now to a TV star. Business wise he is not really a player any more but TV wise he is a star. So it is quite interesting how, as TV people become more business like, businessmen have become sort of divas (interview with authors, 13 March 2009).

In many ways this political fixation with high media profile business ‘stars’ reflects a broader cultural shift around the mediation of politics and the function of aspects of celebrity.

Against a backdrop of a political culture often fixated with the importance of image and the usage of public relations and media management in broader political communication, what politicians are buying into is the mediated image of the ‘television entrepreneur’. Doug Richard was one of the original ‘dragons’ on the BBC series in 2005. His background as an angel investor long predates his involvement in the show, but he is clear about the impact that having a television profile has in allowing access to political elites. Commenting on the ability of fellow-‘dragon’ Peter Jones to gain direct government backing from PM Gordon Brown for his National Enterprise Academy launched in 2009, despite having no experience of the education sector, Richard is scathing:

Why would a Peter Jones [type] be there – he is not qualified on any level. So what [kind of] Peter Jones is it that is putatively qualified – it is a fictional one, it is a persona that was created by the BBC. [] The thing that is really sad is not that Peter Jones has fallen for the persona that has

been painted of him, but that Gordon Brown has. And some people would say he is just using him – no way, because he is actually using his proposals – not just using him as a figure. So we now actually have government turning to fictional persona to drive policy. People who should know better, and should be actually looking to real accomplishments and be able to discern what is real from what is fiction, have fallen for the fiction – that is an astonishing indictment of our current situation (interview with authors, 2 June 2009).

This particular government decision was also controversial because Jones appeared to be given Whitehall backing at the expense of an academy focusing on engineering that was championed by the inventor and entrepreneur Sir James Dyson. For Richard, this change of focus can in part be attributed to Gordon Brown believing that due to his higher media profile, Jones would garner more plaudits and associated media headlines than Dyson. Richard argues that:

The reason Gordon Brown pick[ed] him is because Peter is still on *Dragons' Den* and James Dyson has never been, so one [persona] is real and one is fictional (interview with authors, 2 June 2009).

Indeed the media coverage became a Dyson v Jones story in which various allegations about why one proposed project (around nurturing engineering and under discussion for a number of years) was dropped in favour of the lower cost National Enterprise Academy (fostering and teaching entrepreneurial skills) championed by Jones. We would argue that while there were clearly a range of issues associated with each project, the media profile of Jones (with no experience in the educational field), his ability to network and understand the policy machine of Whitehall and his strategy of

dealing directly with the Gordon Brown, were important factors in the successful endorsement of the scheme.

Richard himself acknowledges that his invitation to chair the Conservative Party's Taskforce on Small Business in part came from his own media profile. 'Would I have been asked had I not been on *Dragons' Den*? No I would not have' (interview with authors, 2 June 2009). Although he has twenty-five years experience of working both in the US and UK with government programmes to encourage small business development, again the media capital he has accrued through television helped facilitate political access.

The Dyson connection does not end there. Sir James, who through the profile of his Dyson range of products does have a media profile (although not, it must be noted, a television profile like that of Jones), was also asked in 2009 by David Cameron's Conservative Party to write a report looking at how best to develop Britain as a high technology exporter within Europe and beyond. Entitled 'Ingenious Britain', the Dyson report (2010) appeared a year later and examined the cultural, educational and economic shifts in emphasis required to re-focus Britain as a high technology, engineering and design economy. It was warmly endorsed by the Conservative Party with Ken Clarke, the Shadow Business Secretary, indicating that any Conservative government would broadly follow the report's agenda and recommendations.

The Political Business Class

We would argue that the growing use of celebrity business endorsement is indicative of a recognition that most senior ministers in the UK are professional politicians with little or no 'real life' business experience. Part of what Osborne (2008, p. 6) has called

the 'political class' who often lack credibility with the business community and public more generally:

Members of the Political Class make government their exclusive study.

This means they tend not to have significant experience of industry, commerce, or civil society.

Thus, for politicians lacking a business 'hinterland' these 'business experts' lend, in the eyes of politicians at least, credence and credibility to their political interventions in these areas of policy formation. In this way the relationship is different from other forms of celebrity endorsement that politicians have traditionally mobilized as they associate themselves with leading stars from the world of sport and the entertainment industries.

In other respects these 'television entrepreneurs' are also benefiting from an increasingly symbiotic relationship between political and media elites. Again this is not new, but there has been a step change in the level of integration between political and media networks of power (Osborne 2008, pp. 257-8; Davis 2007; Stanyer 2007) in the last two decades. The intensification, since the election of New Labour in 1997, of a London-centric social networking circuit that brings together the political, media and business classes is well illustrated in the memoirs of former *Daily Mirror* newspaper editor Piers Morgan (2005) where he recounts the numerous occasions he was invited to Downing Street by Tony Blair or would meet senior government ministers on the social circuit. Likewise, Duncan Bannatyne had been making donations to the Labour Party since 1997 and was a well-known businessman in his North-East base. Yet, following his appearance on *Mind of a Millionaire* (BBC, 2003) and as one of the original 'dragons' on *Dragons' Den* his profile changed dramatically as he found himself being invited to speak with Gordon Brown in

Downing Street and play a role in shaping government schools policy around encouraging entrepreneurship (Bannatyne 2006, p. 275). This is in addition to the aforementioned media and television career he has subsequently developed.

It would appear therefore that just as the vocational skills possessed by these entrepreneurs bring them to the attention of television producers in the first instance, their televisual skills and ability to cultivate a wider media profile then allows them access to the political elite, enabling them to air their opinions, contribute to policy and even establish national education centres (as in the case of Peter Jones) with the backing of the British government. While in a similar manner to traditional celebrity networks this is partly about a common currency of media profile, for the new generation of ‘television entrepreneurs’ it also reveals a perception among the political class that these business celebrities are more likely to reach out and connect with the public on business-related issues than politicians are. Indeed this process is taking place against a wider global shift in the rise of what, rather uncritically, Bishop and Green (2008) have called ‘the age of philanthrocapitalism’ where ‘celanthropists’ or celebrity givers such as Bill Gates, Bill Clinton, George Soros, Bono and Sir Tom Hunter form networks of influence between government, foundations, think-tanks, the super-rich and celebrity culture to shape and influence global change in policy areas such as the environment. Again, while the issue of using celebrity to advance particular political narratives is not new, these new types of networks do operate on a global level like never before.

Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to begin to map out a developing area around celebrity studies that recognizes the importance of previous work on television

personalities at the same time as moving on to consider wider circuits of communication in the underlying celebrity industry and its impact on other areas of the public sphere such as policy formation within the UK context.

Much of the debate around celebrity within the realm of media and cultural studies has thus far been relatively narrowly focused (Turner 2010) and we would argue that by looking at other areas, and indeed disciplines, this agenda can be broadened out. Our focus on business celebrities reveals the continued importance of television in bringing certain types of professionals to the attention of the public due to their vocational skills and knowledge. It also demonstrates the way in which mastering televisual skills can act as an entry point into the wider media landscape through which an integrated PR network can work to extend individual brands and transform television entrepreneurs into ‘celebrity commodities’ that can be used to sell or endorse a range of products.

In addition to using the media to promote their own individual brands, business interests and commercial products, we have shown how business celebrities can in turn be used to endorse political ideas. One of the successes of the business entertainment format on television has been its ability to utilize key individuals as a way of humanizing and demystifying the often clandestine world of business and this approach appears to have since been transferred to the political arena with politicians similarly using business celebrity endorsements to simplify the complex and byzantine field of policy formation.

Securing such high profile individuals plays into a wider media agenda in which personalizing complex processes has become a key characteristic of news journalism. Thus, political ideology is increasingly reduced to the personalities of the various party leaders while specific ‘villains’ were recently singled out as being

responsible for the global banking crisis. In essence, the mediation of ‘celebrity’ in all its forms has become a fixation with politicians keen to connect with the voting public, despite the fact that the perceived influence of such an approach on media audiences has yet to be proved.

Indeed we would agree with Couldry and Markham (2007, p. 418) who caution against making general assumptions about the role of celebrity culture as part of any political programme to re-connect with voters. Our own research has indicated that where viewers are in terms of their own business background will shape how they engage with broader television representations of entrepreneurship. However, what is of interest here is the extent that the notion of celebrity endorsement through its ‘false intimacy’ with the public has become embedded in perceptions about the role these ‘television entrepreneurs’ can and should play in the broader arena of policy formation.

It seems to us that understanding the continuing key role played by networks and their relationship with power in all its forms remains crucial in understanding celebrity. Particular forms of media capital appear to allow access to particular circuits of communication, but exploring the barriers of entry to networks also remains important. Celebrity networks are often about a shared common currency of media profile, however for the new generation of ‘television entrepreneurs’ it is also representative of a perception among the political class that this group are more likely to reach out and connect with the public on business related issues than politicians are.

Endnote

When in 2009 it was announced that television entrepreneur Simon Cowell was teaming up with business ‘celebrity tycoon’ Sir Philip Green to create a television production, talent management and merchandising company, the synergies between various business and television networks was clear. Less than a year later and Prime Minister Gordon Brown can tell us that he asked Simon Cowell to come on board to help form policy, however Cowell was ‘too busy’ and declined (Moran, *Radio Times*, 2010, p. 25). Meanwhile Sir Philip Green is sharing a platform with David Cameron and endorsing the Conservative Party in the 2010 British General Election.

Understanding the strange and complex power nexus that continues to operate in modern Britain cutting across business, media and politics will be fertile terrain for future celebrity studies interventions for some time to come.

Notes

1. The term ‘entrepreneur’ is a highly contested one but in this instance we are referring to those business professionals who appear on television and either identify themselves as entrepreneurs (onscreen or through social media for example) or are described by the print media in this way.
2. This article comes out of a wider project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council entitled *Public Understanding of Business: Television, Representation and Entrepreneurship*. ID No: AH/F017073/1. All interviews cited were carried out as part of this research.
3. The original television troubleshooter was Sir John Harvey-Jones who, alongside television producer Robert Thirkell, helped create the troubleshooter format with the eponymous BBC series broadcast in the early 1990s. For more details see Kelly and Boyle (forthcoming).

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