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Original Article

Celebrity Politics in Bangladesh: Motivations, Campaign Engagement, and Electoral Influence

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Abstract: In Bangladesh, there is a growing tendency among celebrities to take part in politics. This research explores the reasons for celebrity candidacy in parliamentary elections and the effect of celebrityhood on voter attitudes and election results. Celebrities, who often lack political experience, can rapidly assert their political presence, even to the point of ousting established politicians. This research examines the phenomenon of celebrity politics in the context of Bangladesh's democratic political culture and socio-economic environment by using secondary data to appraise the effects. Results show that celebrity involvement in politics is a combination of personal ambition and career diversification, as well as party strategies to benefit from celebrities' popularity. While fame helps to build emotional bonds with voters and attract young and first-time voters, electoral success is determined by party organization, political programs, patronage and political dominance. This study adds to international debates about the politics of celebrities and its consequences for democratic politics. The research adopts the source credibility model, political marketing theory and motivation theory as its theoretical foundations.

Keywords: Celebrity politics, electoral behavior, political communication, popular culture

Introduction

In recent years, celebrities have become more active in politics across the world. Earlier, celebrities were mainly discussed in relation to popular culture and entertainment. However, they are now also important in political communication, election campaigns, and public participation (Wheeler, 2013). The term 'celebrity' derives from the Latin words 'celebritas' (fame) and 'celeber' (frequented), and therefore a celebrity is renowned for his 'know-ness' and has a name that requires no further identification (Gurikar, 2023). Celebrity political participation can take different forms. Some celebrities directly join political parties and contest parliamentary elections. Others support parties, campaign for candidates, or use their public voice to influence voters. This trend is important because celebrities often enter politics with strong public recognition, even when they have limited political experience. Celebrities and the political arena are intertwined mainly because some political actors tend to use celebrities as their campaign instruments (Biswas, 2024).

Celebrity politics is closely linked with media visibility, personal image, and public trust. In many countries, voters often respond not only to party programs, but also to the personal image of political leaders and candidates. Public figures from entertainment, sports, and media can use their fame to build emotional connections with voters. Examples from global politics show how celebrity status can help individuals gain political attention and support.

A similar trend can also be seen in South Asia. In India, film stars have played important roles in electoral politics, especially in states where cinema and political identity are closely connected (Prasad, 2013). Celebrity status is a form of political capital when it connects with party support,

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public emotion, and voter trust. The celebrity phenomenon has deeply permeated Pakistani politics, with portrayals of renowned politicians focusing more on personality than on policy. No case is more evident than that of Imran Khan, where 78 percent of the media coverage is personality-focused (Safdar et al., 2025). This is still in line with his former image as a cricketing legend, whereby the media has packaged him as a person who is charismatic and heroic (Kanemasu, 2023).

Bangladesh has also seen a rise in celebrity participation in politics, especially from sports, music, film, and television. Some celebrity candidates have entered parliamentary politics and gained public attention because of their fame and popularity. However, Bangladesh has received less academic attention in this area compared with other countries. Existing studies mostly focus on party politics, elections, governance, and democratic challenges. There is still limited research on why celebrities enter politics and how their celebrity status affects voter attitudes and election results. This study addresses that gap by examining celebrity politics in Bangladesh. It focuses on two main questions. First, it explores the reasons why celebrities become involved in parliamentary elections. Second, it examines how celebrity status shapes voter perception, campaign engagement, and electoral influence. The study argues that fame can help celebrities attract attention and build emotional links with voters, but electoral success also depends on party support, campaign strategy, local networks, and the wider political environment.

Literature Review

Celebrities are public figures whose fame goes beyond their original work in film, music, sports, television, or other cultural fields (Marshall, 1997). Their popularity, media presence, and public appeal can help them enter political spaces and influence voters. Scholars argue that the growth of digital media has made it easier for celebrities to become involved in political communication and electoral politics (Street, 2004; Wheeler, 2013). This trend is also linked with the mediatization of politics, where image, personality, and public performance become important parts of political life (Corner, 2007).

In the West, celebrity politics is often connected with media exposure and the personalization of leadership. Examples such as Ronald Reagan, Silvio Berlusconi, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy show how media fame can help public figures gain political attention and support (Nico, 2025). However, scholars also note that fame alone is not enough. Celebrity politicians still need public trust, political skill, and a sense of authenticity to become successful in the long run (Street, 2004; Street, 2012; Wheeler, 2013).

In South Asia, celebrity politics has developed in different ways. In India, film stars have played important roles in state and national politics. The political rise of film personalities in places such as Tamil Nadu shows how stardom can become a strong source of public support (Prasad, 2013). In Pakistan, sports fame has also shaped political life, especially through the case of Imran Khan, whose cricket career helped him build political popularity and national recognition (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). These examples show that celebrity status can connect with party politics, public emotion, and voter support.

Compared with India, Pakistan, Europe, and the United States, Bangladesh has received less academic attention in studies of celebrity politics. Research on Bangladesh has mostly focused on elections, party politics, governance, political violence, and democratic challenges (Hassan & Nazneen, 2017). However, celebrities have become more visible in parliamentary politics. Figures from music, sports, film, and television have joined elections and campaigns, showing how fame can be used in political competition. Political parties may nominate celebrity candidates to gain public attention, improve campaign visibility, and attract young or media-focused voters.

There is limited research on how Bangladeshi voters judge celebrity candidates in terms of trust, ability, and sincerity. There is also a need to understand whether celebrity status only creates campaign attention or whether it truly affects electoral success. This study addresses that gap by examining celebrity motivation, campaign engagement, and electoral influence in Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses three related ideas to understand celebrity politics in Bangladesh: motivation theory, the source credibility model, and political marketing theory. These ideas help explain why celebrities enter parliamentary politics, why parties nominate them, and how voters respond to their public image. Motivation theory helps explain why celebrities may join politics. Some celebrities may be driven by a wish to serve society, gain respect, or take part in national life. Others may see politics as a way to gain power, status, security, or a new career path. Maslow's idea of human motivation is useful here because it shows that people are not only motivated by basic needs, but also by respect, recognition, and self-fulfilment (Maslow, 1943). In Bangladesh, political parties also invite celebrities because they can attract public attention, especially among young and media-focused voters. The source credibility model explains why voters may listen to celebrity candidates. Voters are more likely to be influenced by a person they see as credible, familiar, and trustworthy (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Ohanian (1990) also shows that celebrity influence is often linked with expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In Bangladesh, many voters already know celebrities through media and popular culture. This familiarity can create emotional closeness. Horton and Wohl's idea of para-social interaction also explains how audiences may feel personally connected to media figures, even when they have no direct relationship with them (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Political marketing theory explains how parties use celebrities as campaign resources. Elections can be seen as a process where parties and candidates present themselves to voters through image, message, and public appeal (Newman, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001). Celebrity candidates help parties gain media attention, increase campaign visibility, and make political messages easier.

However, this framework also shows that fame alone does not ensure electoral success. In Bangladesh, celebrity candidates still depend on party support, local networks, voter trust, campaign strategy, and the wider political environment. Therefore, celebrity politics should be understood as a process where fame, party power, and voter perception work together to shape electoral influence.

Methodology

This study is primarily qualitative, though a few of the data are also given in quantitative terms for illustration. This study has mostly relied on secondary data sources. It explores the motivations of celebrity political involvement, the manner in which celebrities are involved in the campaigns of mainstream political leaders and parties at various times, and how their celebrity status influences voters and elections within the broader institutional and political context of Bangladesh. The data used in this research have been largely gathered from both published and unpublished research works, pertinent books, articles, reports, working papers, journal articles, and reliable sources of information from the internet. The collected materials were reviewed thematically to identify common patterns related to celebrity motivation, voter perception, and electoral influence. The use of secondary data is suitable for this study because it allows the research to examine celebrity politics over several parliamentary elections and connect individual cases with broader political trends.

Presentation and Analyses of Data

Celebrity Involvement in Bangladeshi Politics

In Bangladesh, celebrities are generally regarded as prestigious figures in society. Political parties are increasingly seeking to exploit their popularity winning votes. As such, the celebrities play a vital role in the latest political framework. There are several cases where some people without political backgrounds have subsequently engaged in politics through their celebrity status. These include film actress Kabori Sarwar, folk singer Momtaz Begum and former cricket players Naimur Rahman Durjoy, Sakib-Al-Hasan, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. Such individuals became MPs despite not having a political background. Celebrities are not only running political office, but also participating and endorsing political campaigns. This has grown over time, especially in the parliamentary elections. Celebrities have been increasingly used by political parties to gain public attention, garner

support and boost electoral efforts. This demonstrates a move towards a more image-based and personality-based politics. This has been more apparent in recent years. Few political parties have nominated a number of celebrities in parliamentary elections to strengthen its electoral appeal. Table 1 shows a summary of the celebrities in politics in the time between 2001-2026.

Table 1. Celebrity candidates and their electoral outcomes in Bangladesh

Year and PE	Celebrity Candidates	Celebrity Background	Election Verdict	Election area / Seat
2001-8th	Asaduzzaman Noor	Actor	Won	Nilphamari-2
2008-9th	Asaduzzaman Noor	Actor	Won	Nilphamari-2
	Kabori Sarwar	Film Actress	Won	Narayanganj-4
	Momtaz Begum	Folk Singer	Selected	Reserved women's seat
2014-10th	Asaduzzaman Noor	Actor	Won	Nilphamari-2
	Momtaz Begum	Folk Singer	Won	Manikganj-2
	Naimur Rahman Durjoy	Cricketer	Won	Manikganj-1
	Arif Khan Joy	Football Player	Won	Netrokona-2
2018-11th	Asaduzzaman Noor	Actor	Won	Nilphamari-2
	Momtaz Begum	Folk Singer	Won	Manikganj-2
	Mashrafe Bin Mortaza	Cricketer	Won	Narail-2
	Kanak Chapa	Singer	Lost	Sirajganj-1
2024-12th	Asaduzzaman Noor	Actor	Won	Nilphamari-2
	Shakib Al Hasan	Cricketer	Won	Magura-1
	Mashrafe Bin Mortaza	Cricketer	Won	Narail-2
	Ferdous Ahmed	Actor	Won	Dhaka-10
	Momtaz Begum	Folk Singer	Lost	Manikganj-2
	Mahiya Mahi	Film Actress	Independent (Lost)	Rajshahi-1
	Doly Sayontoni	Singer	Lost	Pabna-2
	Nakul Kumar Biswas	Singer	Lost	Madaripur-2
2026-13th	Aminul Haque	Football Player	Lost	Dhaka-16

Sources: *Bangladesh Election Commission/ https://ecs.gov.bd/ National Election-(2001-2026)*
Note: Table 1 depicts the participation of some celebrity candidates from various fields of popular culture, such as movie, music, cricket and football in Bangladesh's parliamentary elections from 2001 to 2026. The column 'Selected' indicates candidates who were elected to parliament through reserved female seats. In order to gain a better quantitative picture of the role of celebrities in Bangladesh's parliamentary elections, the data were organized by sex and success rate.

The table below shows the total number of celebrity candidacies or nominations, and the distribution of male and female candidates and their success and failure rates. This overview reveals the general trend of celebrity participation, and how successful celebrity candidates were in political elections.

Table 2. Summary statistics of celebrity candidacies/nominations in Bangladesh's parliamentary elections

Category	Number	Percentage
Total celebrity candidacies / nominations identified	21	100%
Male candidates	13	61.90%
Female candidates	8	38.10%
Total won (Male+ Female)	15	71.43%
Total lost / not elected (Male+ Female)	6	28.57%
Male candidates won	11	84.62% of male candidates
Male candidates lost	2	15.38% of male candidates
Female candidates won	4	50.00% of female candidates
Female candidates lost	4	50.00% of female candidates

Sources: *Bangladesh Election Commission/ https://ecs.gov.bd/ National Election-(2001-2026)*

The table above shows that there were 21 celebrity candidacies or nominations in the chosen parliamentary elections. Of these, 13 were males, accounting for 61.90%, and 8 were females, accounting for 38.10%. This indicates that male celebrities were more likely to be nominated or run in parliamentary elections than female celebrities. The results also indicate that 15 out of 21 of the celebrity candidacies were successful, with a success rate of 71.43%. However, 6 candidacies were

not, which accounts for 28.57% of the total. Comparing the success rates of male and female celebrity candidates, we see that the former had a higher rate of success, with 11 out of 13 male candidates elected. This equates to 84.62% of male candidacies. Female celebrity candidates had an equal rate of success and failure with 4 wins and 4 losses, equating to a 50% success rate. In conclusion, the data indicate that the celebrity candidates, especially the male ones, achieved a high success rate in the cases studied. But the equal victory and defeat rates of female celebrity candidates suggest that being a celebrity does not necessarily translate into electoral success, particularly in relation to gender and patterns of party nomination.

Causes of Celebrity Engagement in Bangladeshi Politics

Celebrity engagement in Bangladeshi politics can be understood through the interests of three main groups: voters, political parties, and celebrities themselves. From the voters' side, celebrity candidates may appear more familiar and trustworthy than traditional politicians. In Bangladesh, many voters are dissatisfied with party politics, corruption, weak leadership, and lack of accountability. As a result, they may look for alternative figures who seem more relatable and honest. Celebrities from sports, music, film, and television already have public recognition, and this recognition can create trust among voters. This is linked with the idea of source credibility, where people are more likely to be influenced by public figures they see as credible and familiar (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). Another reason is the emotional connection between celebrities and the public. Through television, films, music, sports, and social media, audiences often feel close to celebrities, even without any direct personal relationship. Horton and Wohl (1956) describe this as a para-social relationship. In the Bangladeshi context, this emotional closeness can help celebrity candidates gain attention and support, especially among young and media-focused voters.

Political parties also have strong reasons to involve celebrities. Celebrities can attract media attention, pull crowds to rallies, and make election campaigns more visible. In a competitive political environment, parties may use celebrity candidates as campaign resources to reach voters more easily (BouNassif et al., 2022). This fits with Political Marketing Theory, which explains how parties and candidates present themselves to voters through image, message, and public appeal (Newman, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001). In Bangladesh, the nomination of figures such as Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, and Ferdous Ahmed shows how parties may use fame and popularity to strengthen electoral campaigns.

For celebrities, politics can offer a new form of public influence. Some may enter politics because they want to serve society, support national development, or take part in policy-making. Others may see politics as a way to gain status, power, career security, and long-term public relevance. Maslow's idea of motivation helps explain this because people are often driven by respect, recognition, and self-fulfilment, not only by material needs (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, celebrity engagement in Bangladeshi politics is shaped by voter expectations, party strategy, and the personal ambitions of celebrities.

Democratic Concerns about Celebrity Engagement in Bangladeshi Politics

Although celebrity participation can make politics more visible and attractive, it also raises important concerns for democracy and representation. One major concern is that fame may become more important than political experience. Some celebrities enter politics without a strong background in grassroots work, policy-making, or public administration. If parties nominate them mainly because of their popularity, experienced local leaders may be ignored. This can weaken internal party democracy and reduce the value of long-term political work. A second concern is the effect of celebrity status on voter choice. Some voters may support a celebrity candidate because of admiration, emotional attachment, or media popularity rather than policy knowledge, competence, or public service record. This can shift attention away from important issues such as governance, unemployment, inequality, corruption, and local development. In this way, celebrity politics may encourage a more personality-based style of election campaigning (Street, 2004; Wheeler, 2013).

Celebrity candidates may also be used as political tools by parties. Their fame can help parties gain publicity, increase campaign excitement, and attract young voters. However, this may produce short-term electoral benefits without improving the quality of representation. Celebrity candidates may succeed in creating public attention, but they may not always have the skills needed for lawmaking, constituency service, and parliamentary work.

Another important concern is accountability. Some celebrities may enter politics because of party nomination, public pressure, or personal ambition, but may not remain active after the election. If they fail to maintain contact with voters or address local problems, the relationship between citizens and representatives can become weak. This is especially important in Bangladesh, where party support, local networks, and public trust remain central to electoral success.

Therefore, celebrity politics in Bangladesh has both promise and risk. It can increase public interest in elections and bring new faces into politics. However, if celebrity status replaces political skill, policy debate, and accountability, it can weaken democratic representation. Gurikar (2023) also stated that "celebrities have negative effect on democracy because they have the resources and the audience to influence politics" (p. 294). For celebrity politics to have a positive role, fame must be supported by commitment, competence, party responsibility, and regular engagement with voters.

Findings and Discussion

The findings show that celebrity politics in Bangladesh is shaped by a close relationship between celebrity ambition, party strategy, and voter response. Celebrities enter politics for different reasons. For some actors, singers, and sports figures, politics becomes a way to continue their public life beyond entertainment, culture, or sports. It gives them a new platform to remain visible, gain respect, and take part in national affairs. This also connects with the idea that fame can become a form of political power when it is used in public life (Marshall, 1997; Street, 2004).

The findings also show that political parties play an important role in bringing celebrities into elections. Parties often view celebrities as useful campaign resources because they already have public attention, media value, and emotional appeal. Their presence can attract crowds, increase media coverage, and make campaign messages easier to promote. This supports political marketing theory, which explains how parties and candidates use image, message, and public appeal to reach voters (Newman, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001). In Bangladesh, celebrity candidates such as Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Ferdous Ahmed, Momtaz Begum, and Asaduzzaman Noor show how parties may use fame to strengthen their electoral appeal (Azran, 2023).

The data also suggest that celebrity status can help candidates gain visibility, but it does not guarantee victory. Table 2 shows that 15 out of 21 identified celebrity candidacies or nominations were successful, giving a success rate of 71.43 percent. This shows that celebrities have had a strong presence in parliamentary elections. However, the defeats of candidates such as Mahiya Mahi, Doly Sayontoni, Nakul Kumar Biswas, and Momtaz Begum in 2024 show that popularity alone is not enough. Electoral success in Bangladesh still depends on party support, local organization, campaign resources, voter trust, and political networks. This reflects the party-centred nature of Bangladeshi politics, where parties and local structures remain very important in elections.

Celebrity politics also affects voter perception. Many voters already know celebrities through television, film, music, cricket, football, and social media. This familiarity can create trust and emotional closeness. The source credibility model helps explain this point, as voters may respond positively to public figures whom they see as familiar, trustworthy, and attractive (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990). The idea of para-social interaction is also relevant because audiences may feel connected to celebrities even without direct contact (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This can be especially important among young and media-focused voters.

However, celebrity politics also creates democratic concerns. It can increase public interest in elections and bring new faces into politics, but it may also shift attention away from policy, experience, and accountability. If voters focus mainly on fame and image, important issues such as

governance, corruption, unemployment, and local development may receive less attention which matches the opinion of Billah (2024) that at the end of the day celebrities are performers, not law makers; and the real politicians cannot get involved with the national aspects as the celebrity image very often squeezes their place. Celebrity politics presents both opportunities and democratic risks, as celebrity candidates may attract greater public interest and voter engagement while also encouraging image-based voting, overshadowing policy issues, and raising concerns about political experience, accountability, and governing competence (Gurikar, 2023). Therefore, celebrity politics in Bangladesh should be understood as both an opportunity and a challenge. Fame can help candidates gain attention, but effective representation requires political skill, public commitment, party responsibility, and regular engagement with voters.

Conclusion

This paper studied the rise of celebrity politics in Bangladesh, focusing on why celebrities enter parliamentary politics, how parties use them in campaigns, and how their fame affects voters and election results. The study showed that celebrity involvement is shaped by both personal ambition and party strategy. Many celebrities enter politics to extend their public careers, gain influence, serve society, or build a lasting public legacy. Political parties, on the other hand, utilize celebrities as useful campaign figures who can attract media attention, draw crowds, and appeal to young and first-time voters. The findings also indicate that celebrity status can create visibility and emotional connection with voters, especially in the age of Facebook, YouTube, and other digital media. However, fame alone does not ensure electoral success. Party support, local organization, campaign resources, public trust, and political experience remain very important in Bangladesh's party-centred political system. Overall, celebrity politics has both positive and negative effects. It can increase public interest in elections and bring new personalities into politics. At the same time, it may weaken policy-based discussion and encourage personality-based politics. Therefore, celebrity politics can contribute positively only when fame is supported by accountability, competence, and active public service.

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