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## Political Oracles, Issues, and Candidates: It's in the Stars

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Title: Political Oracles, Issues, and Candidates: It's in the Stars

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**Abstract.** This article describes some parameters in employing media stars to support campaigns for political initiatives.

A very old tradition in political campaigns for issues and candidates is the employing of media stars, e.g., athletes, actors, musicians, as part of the effort. Even though (especially because?) these stars often are not sophisticated about the various merits of a political initiative, their cooperation is still sought. But what parameters help distinguish successful from unsuccessful employment, from efforts that contribute to victory from those that actually backfire?

Two researchers at the University of Waterloo (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997) have carried out research suggesting that a crucial aspect of the star's potential credibility and persuasiveness is the seeming relevance and attainability of their success. If targets of the campaign believe that they too have enough time, ability, or luck to have a shot at accomplishing the real or imagined feats or status of the star--and these feats or status are deemed important by the same people--they are more likely to change their self-views to be more consonant with the star. If the same people believe the star's domain of excellence is not important and that--in any case--attainability is very unlikely, they are more likely to experience self-deflation than move their self-views to be more consonant with the star.

The above hypotheses may seem straightforward and easy to implement, but there are several problems. (1) In line with elaboration likelihood models of persuasion, the star's potential import may be much less significant on political matters that are of great concern to people, much more significant on matters of less concern. It's as if the more important the politics, the less important the star. (Sometimes, however, the most important politics are associated with the most unimportant initiatives.) (2) Even after achieving desired changes in self-views consonant with a political strategist's goals, one must address many other factors affecting when, if, and how long these changes will be compatible with actual behaviors like demonstrating for an issue or candidate, talking either up with acquaintances, and actually voting as appropriate. (3) Stars may quickly lose their luster through personal and professional miscues. A risk analysis may suggest that although the star may incrementally contribute to success, there always is the possibility of total disaster.

Amongst the stories of Greek mythology are those of the Delphic Oracle. Prophecies were never wrong. The truth they imparted always was in the stars but was at times misinterpreted by lesser mortals. Unlike falling stars from up above that one would seek to catch, put in one's pocket, and save for a rainy day, the falling stars of today's media are of as much value for advancing a political initiative as yesterday's scandal sheets. (See Collins, R. L. (1996.) For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparisons on self-evaluations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119, 51-69; Lockwood, P., & Kunda, Z. (1997.) Superstars and me: Predicting the impact of role models on the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 91-103; Taylor, S.E., & Lobel, M. (1989.) Social comparison activity under threat: Downward evaluation and upward contacts. *Psychological Review*, 96, 569-575.) (Keywords: Information Warfare, Perception Management.)