

CELEBRITIES TURNING INTO POPULISTS: THE CELEBRITY POPULISM OF MIROSLAV ŠKORO DURING THE 2019 CROATIAN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER / DOI: 10.20901/ms.13.25.3 / SUBMITTED: 15.12.2021.

ABSTRACT *Populist politicians performing as celebrities and celebrities becoming populist politicians is a phenomenon that illustrates how populism and celebrity politics can easily be combined in contemporary political communication. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the latter type of celebrity populist by analyzing the Facebook posts of Croatian musician and populist politician, Miroslav Škoro, during the 2019 presidential campaign in Croatia. The conducted qualitative content analysis led to the conclusion that, in the context of celebrity populism, the concept of “the people” attains more meaning and power, as celebrity capital is used for an even stronger emphasis of populist appeal to “the people.” This is seen through two main categories that emerged from the analysis: 1) representation of celebrity fans as “the people” and 2) using celebrity background as proof of unity with the people.*

KEYWORDS

CELEBRITY POPULISM, POPULISM, CELEBRITY POLITICS, MIROSLAV ŠKORO, CROATIA

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INTRODUCTION

Populist politicians are attracting attention all around the world, leading authors such as Cas Mudde (2004) describe the age we live in as “The Populist Zeitgeist”, or, as the title of Benjamin Moffitt’s book suggests, the “Global rise of populism” (Moffitt, 2016). Populism as a phenomenon allows for a variety of approaches. For instance, it is seen as ideology, style, strategy, performance, or discourse. In this research, I combine approaches to populism as an idea and style as I argue that ideas are expressed through communication (which includes content and style). On the other hand, to focus only on the political style or communicative aspect would mean ignoring the connection to the ideas of political leadership that are ideological. Furthermore, I narrow it to a specific style of celebrity and refer to it as celebrity populism. Celebrity populism illustrates how celebrity politics and populism can be combined in different ways, which is not unusual since both have in common the endeavor to get closer to the citizens.

The phenomenon of celebrities turning into populists can be seen in examples around the world: Donald Trump in the USA, Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine, Beppe Grillo in Italy, and Pawel Kukiz in Poland, to mention just a few. The same pattern is visible in the case of Croatian musician and now politician Miroslav Škoro. While the literature on celebrity politics recognizes the process of celebrities entering the political arena (Street, 2004; t Hart & Tindall, 2009), the specific phenomenon of celebrities using populism has only recently gained recognition. Šalaj and Grbeša (2022) refer to this type of politicians as celebrity populists.

The present study builds on this literature to better understand one type of celebrity populist politician: one who comes from the celebrity world and uses celebrity capital in combination with populism. The aim is to obtain a deeper understanding of the way celebrity and populist dimensions can, in this case, be combined and complement each other. To obtain a better understanding of how celebrity populists combine the two, I look at the phenomenon from the perspective of political communication. I argue that celebrity capital can support populism and emphasize its appeal and unity with the people in different ways. Someone with celebrity capital has already created a connection with the people who are central to populism, and the connection that a celebrity has with his or her fans can be converted into political capital and connection with “the people.”

Therefore, this research study looks closer into the way celebrity capital can be used in combination with populism using the example of Miroslav Škoro. Škoro was an independent candidate during the 2019 presidential elections in Croatia, and although he did not win the elections, he gained significant attention and support, later formed a political party, and became a member of the parliament. His constant appeal to “the people” while opposing the political elite and presenting himself as part of the ordinary people during the presidential elections puts him in a populist framework.

For this reason, the case study of Miroslav Škoro and his communication on Facebook during the 2019 presidential campaign in Croatia is examined using qualitative content

analysis, focusing on how he uses his celebrity background in combination with populist ideas and messages. The findings from this study bring new knowledge on populism, specifying the way celebrity capital can emphasize populist messages and ideas.

This paper is organized as follows. In the theoretical chapter I explain how celebrity politics is understood as a dimension of style in celebrity populism, and how populism is, besides being an idea, also understood as a style in this context. Before elaborating methodology, the phenomenon is explained in consideration of the Croatian context and Miroslav Škoro within it. The findings reveal the most interesting points that explain how he used his celebrity capital to emphasize populist messages while the last section of the article discusses the findings in more detail.

CELEBRITY POLITICS AS A STYLE OF CELEBRITY POPULISM

The concept of celebrity politics and typologies of celebrity politicians are regularly used to describe changes in politics and political communication influenced by media and the mediated world (Corner & Pels, 2003; Drake & Higgins, 2006; Marsh et al., 2010, Street, 2004; van Zoonen, 2005; Wheeler, 2013). Style, performance, and personalities have increasingly become recognized as things that matter in political communication (Corner & Pels, 2003, p. 2). Politicians are often present in the media not only when they talk about policies or political issues, but they are often represented as family persons, people with problems, funny, and generally, as people with private lives similar to those of ordinary citizens. The personalization of politics (see Holtz-Bacha, 2004), together with the popularization of politics, is seen as the way celebrity politics manifests in the mediated world (van Zoonen, 2006, p. 289).

Therefore, it is not unusual that some politicians can, because of their increased media presence, and sharing of their personal lives, be seen as celebrities, especially in reference to David Marshall's (1997, ix) definition of celebrities as those who "enjoy a greater presence and wider scope of activity and agency than those who make up the rest of the population. They are allowed to move on the public stage while the rest of us watch."

Celebrity politics does not refer only to the transformation of politicians into celebrity-like performers, as scholars also orient their work to creating a typology of celebrity politicians (Hart & Tindall, 2011; Marsh et al., 2010; Street, 2004; West & Orman, 2003; Wood et al., 2016). Different typologies describe the type that represents celebrities who engage with politics to the point that they run in elections. Street (2004) recognizes this type of politician as a *celebrity politician* who uses techniques from the celebrity world. These politicians use their celebrity capital, which van Krieken (2012, p. 54) describes as attention that celebrity has. Similarly, Driessens (2013, p. 554) sees celebrity capital as "accumulated media visibility through recurrent media representations." He extends Bourdieu's field theory and argues that celebrity capital can be transformed into political capital in the shape of political power (Driessens, 2013, p. 555).

Celebrity capital is usually gained outside the political arena, as in the case of Miroslav Škoro. In their typology of celebrity politics, 't Hart and Tindall (2009) categorize this type of politician as a *celebrity politician*. They describe how celebrities who are becoming politicians use their celebrity capital as they are already known in public, visible in media, and have easy access to publicity, which is important for getting the support for their political aim, which may give them a particular advantage over those who do not have this kind of capital ('t Hart & Tindall, 2011, p. 263). The key transformative moment includes celebrities obtaining the balance to avoid overexploiting their celebrityhood while appearing more serious in altering their image from celebrity to politician (Olivier, 2013; 't Hart & Tindall, 2011).

The link between celebrity politics and populism was recognized in the literature primarily by noticing how populists can, because of their style, also be studied as celebrity politicians (Bartoszewicz, 2019; Moffitt, 2016; Street, 2019; van Krieken, 2018). Moreover, journal *Celebrity studies* has recently devoted a special issue to examine how "celebrity's intersection with populism is changing the ways Europe's nations are imagined and governed in the era of neoliberal globalization" (Zeglen & Ewen, 2020, p. 272). Nevertheless, Šalaj and Grbeša (2022) noted that celebrity politicians who adopt populist discourse or ideology have not yet been adequately conceptualized, so they proposed two types of politicians who combine celebrityhood and populism: a celebrity populist and a populist celebrity. In their view, a celebrity who engages with politics and uses populist rhetoric is a *celebrity populist* while *populist celebrity* is a politician who was not a celebrity before his or her political career but who uses celebrity techniques and who can also be categorized as a celebrity politician (Šalaj & Grbeša, 2022).

They recognize Miroslav Škoro as a celebrity populist type, but before entering a discussion on his combination of celebrity capital and populism while running for presidency, I want to elaborate more on populism as a phenomenon that complements celebrity populism.

POPULISM AS AN IDEA OF CELEBRITY POPULISM

With numerous approaches to populism, it is crucial to explain that I regard it as a combination of an ideational approach (Hawkins et al., 2019) and political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2013) because ideas have to be communicated, either through language or through performance. This approach to populism is used in the political communication literature, where it is argued that "the communicative tools used for spreading populist ideas are just as central as the populist ideas themselves" (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 425). Populism is understood both as content and style, with content representing "public communication of core components of populist ideology (such as people-centrism and anti-elitism)" and style explaining "that these messages expressing populist ideology are often associated with the use of a characteristic set of presentational style elements" (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 425).

While different approaches have a hard time agreeing on what kind of phenomenon populism is, the compromise is found for the central core of populism, as all agree that populism is characterized by appealing to the people who are represented as good, and who stay in antagonism to the elite, who are represented as bad (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015, p. 2). This is also part of Mudde's definition of populism, where he sees it as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543).

Adding to this, the ideas, albeit "thin"¹, have to be communicated or performed, so populism can be seen as a political style. While Jagers and Walgrave (2007, p. 323) argue that "the most important element of a political style is the content of the discourse", Moffitt and Tormey (2013) argue performances and aesthetics are much more relevant for style. This article argues that there is a version of the phenomenon that includes a specific style adopted by populism, which is that of celebrity.

In my understanding, the populism part of celebrity populism represents contentwise "the people versus the elite." Although Šalaj and Grbeša (2022) see populism as a thin ideology when they discuss celebrity populism, I believe it is important to notice the combination of style and ideas in this case, which Starita and Trillò (2021) recently recognized while examining the case study of Italian populist Matteo Salvini. They argue that "celebrity politics represents an incarnation of populism as a political style" (Starita & Trillò, 2021, p. 3).

I want to argue that in the combination of populism with celebrity politics, celebrity represents the stylistic component of populism, which is familiar from the celebrity politics literature. It describes how politicians engage with the sphere previously reserved for celebrities, and celebrities engage with politics to the point that some of them become leaders of their countries (Street, 2004). This happens through processes of personalization and popularization of politics (van Zoonen, 2006). Celebrity populism is therefore a specific style of populism. This is to say, not all populists are celebrity politicians, nor are all celebrity politicians also populists. In celebrity populism, populist ideas are communicated through a style that previously belonged to the celebrity world, or through celebrity capital that is used to emphasize the populist appeal to the people and opposition to the elite. It should also be considered that "the people" as a core component of populism are constructed by populists who decide who they are including or excluding from this central concept (see Canovan, 1984; Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016).

¹ Scholars who see populism as an ideology agree it is only a "thin ideology" (for explanation see Freedman, 1998) because it lacks additional values and can therefore mix with other "thick ideologies".

MIROSLAV ŠKORO IN THE CROATIAN POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) have been the two main political parties since Croatia gained independence in 1991, and this has divided the political world in Croatia into two ideological camps.

The strong dominance of the two parties disappeared in Croatia in 2015 and 2016 with the appearance of the new anti-establishment parties, Most (The Bridge) and Živi zid (The Human Shield), which received significant support from voters in elections. Henjak (2018, p. 384) explains that the two new parties brought a different type of discourse in the elections in Croatia. They were not the first political parties or candidates in elections who opposed the duopoly of the two main parties, as since the 2005 and 2007 elections, there were candidates who were not members of one of the parties, but they never managed to threaten the dominant position of HDZ or SDP (Henjak, 2019).

After the elections in 2016, HDZ had to make a coalition with Most to form the government, which presented a turning point. Grbeša and Šalaj (2018) see Most as an anti-establishment party, standing very close to the populism specter, and Živi zid as a typical left populist party.

This opened up space for other anti-establishment candidates and populists. Henjak (2019) sees presidential elections in 2019, when Miroslav Škoro ran as an independent candidate, as the continuation of the rising number of independent candidates who attract citizens, and he argues that Miroslav Škoro proved to be the best option of all the other independent candidates in the 2019 elections, not only for the right-wing voters, but for voters with different political values and those usually labeled as protest voters (Henjak, 2019, p. 422).

Miroslav Škoro is a famous Croatian musician and songwriter. His first hit was "Ne dirajte mi ravnicu" (Do not touch my plain), which became a symbol of the war experience in Croatia. Škoro was closely collaborating with Marko Perković Thompson, a Croatian war veteran and musician famous for his songs with a strong patriotic and nationalistic sentiment. In their songs², they talk about "heroic veterans betrayed by traitors inside and enemies outside the nation" (Baker, 2010, p. 1749), mostly connected to the trials to Croatian generals at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Therefore, Škoro has always been closer to right-wing ideological sentiment in Croatian politics. He was singing in the rallies for HDZ in the early 2000s and even won a seat in the parliament on their list in 2007, where he stayed for 6 months before deciding to leave the position. Besides his music career, Škoro was also a television host, an actor in the humorous show *Večernja škola* (Night School), and a jury member in entertainment shows. He is also a businessman and has a Ph.D. in economics.

² For example, songs "Reci, brate moj" (Tell me, my brother), "Sude mi" (They are putting me on trial).

In 2019, he ran for president of the country as an independent candidate and ended up third in the first round, which was held on December 22, with 24.45% of the votes. He continued his career in politics by forming a political party and becoming a member of parliament in 2020. The presidential campaign is the most interesting one to observe because of his strong presence in the media and activity on social media. Moreover, at that time Škoro represented a new option on the political scene – he was an independent candidate, unattached to the political parties that had already disappointed citizens, which is in accordance with the argument by 't Hart & Tindall (2009) who argue that celebrity politicians have the advantage when they are newcomers in politics.

Even before Škoro announced he would run for the president, the first public opinion poll, HRrejting, on May 21, 2019 (vijesti.hrt.hr, 2019) showed that he had relevant support of 9.4%, which at the time put him in third place in the polls. Later, he commented on that in an interview for the RTL Direkt when he said that “my songs are my program,” and “each of my albums is a campaign, and each of my concerts is a rally” (rtl.hr, 2019). This shows how he used his celebrity capital to argue on his credibility as a politician. An element of populism could already be seen in the video announcement of his presidential candidacy. He said: “the core of my program is an alliance with the people against party elites and compromises made out of sight of the public and the will of the electorate” and “let’s return the state to the people” (Miroslav Skoro Official, 2019). In their work on celebrity populism, Šalaj and Grbeša (2022) define Miroslav Škoro as a celebrity populist because of his celebrity background and populist messages.

METHODOLOGY

The paradigmatic position that this research follows is constructionism. The main goal of the research is to understand how celebrity capital can be used in combination with populist messages and to gain in-depth knowledge about celebrity populists’ political communication. Croatian musician and politician, Miroslav Škoro, was used as a case study because his communication during the presidential campaign was a great source of data that could provide new knowledge connected to the topic. The main research question is “How did Miroslav Škoro combine his celebrity capital with populist messages on Facebook in the 2019 presidential campaign in Croatia?”

The qualitative content analysis was conducted on Škoro’s Facebook posts from the Facebook page “Miroslav Škoro.” His Facebook was chosen for analysis because social media allows populist politicians to appear more authentic (Enli, 2017) and communicate with their followers directly without classical gatekeepers (Manucci, 2017). Moreover, celebrity politicians who want to appear closer to citizens prioritize communication through social media as it allows them to appear like everyday people (Wood et al., 2016). Šalaj and Grbeša (2022), for that reason, emphasize social media as the main stage for celebrity populists.

Although Škoro also used Instagram in the 2019 campaign, Facebook was his most active social media platform. Furthermore, Facebook is still the most popular social network in Croatia, and the main source of news for 55% of citizens in Croatia at the time of the presidential election (The Reuters Institute Digital News, 2020). Facebook content is multimodal (Kress, 2010), so the aim was “to expand the focus of qualitative content analysis frameworks to consider the ways multiple modes – for example, illustrations, photography, written language, and design elements – add to or expand the meaning potential of texts beyond the meaning potentials of individual modes” (Serafini & Reid, 2019, p. 7). The approach mixed concept-driven and data-driven analytical frameworks.

The data were collected in two phases, i.e. two periods: 1) from June 22, 2019, the date when Škoro announced his candidacy, to July 31, 2019, the period when he was actively presenting himself as a new independent candidate trying to gain attention; 2) from December 1, 2019 until the pre-election day, December 21, 2019, because this was the intense period of the official campaign, as the first round of the election was held on December 22, 2019. In sum, 105 posts were collected, but 24 were excluded, including announcements and live streams of rallies, video announcements of TV interviews, and hyperlinks for articles from news sites. This is because such posts were either bringing the mainstream media content or just officially announced events, and although it is still relevant for studying celebrity populism, in this study, the focus was only on direct communication, and not communication in mainstream media or rallies. At the end, 81 posts were analyzed, and elements of celebrity politics and/or populism were found in 43% of them.

The data were separately coded for celebrity politics and populist categories, following the manual by Saldaña (2013). First, the data were coded for the celebrity politics theme using van Zoonen’s (2006) understanding that celebrity politics is manifested through personalization and popularization. Second, the coding of populism was conducted by looking into the presence of categories of “the people,” and “the elite.” Finally, it was analyzed how the categories of populism and celebrity politics were combined in the posts in which both were present.

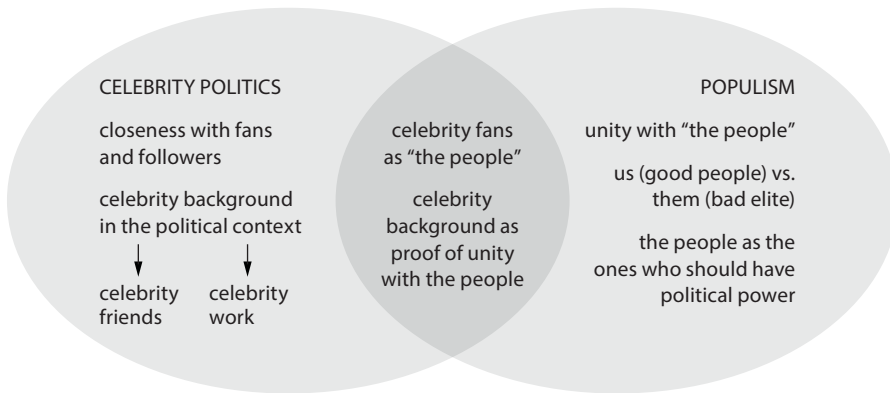
Some of the posts only had elements of celebrity politics, while others had characteristics of populism. The most interesting examples for this study were those that combined both in a single post, as it showed how both dimensions, celebrity and populism, were communicated simultaneously. Moreover, during the analysis, it was noticed that celebrity politics elements were much more visible during the candidacy announcement, while populism was dominant in the last month of the campaign, which coincided with the study from Šalaj and Grbeša (2022), who found that Škoro stepped back from his celebrity role during the official part of the campaign and did not use his celebrity background as might have been expected. This could be relevant for further research on celebrity populists to determine how they develop communication through time and in different political periods.

Two categories that describe celebrity populism – a combination of populism and celebrity politics, or more precisely, celebrity capital – emerged in the analysis:

- 1) Celebrity fans as “the people”
- 2) Celebrity background as proof of unity with the people

All the categories that emerged in the analysis, which will be deconstructed in the following section of the article, are presented visually in Figure 1. It represents how categories from each cluster (celebrity politics and populism) function on their own, but they also have some common elements found in the cross-sections of the circles/clusters.

Firstly, the coding connected to the celebrity politics theme results in categories “closeness with fans/followers” and “celebrity background in the political context.” Two sub-categories connected with the latter category are “celebrity friends” and “celebrity work” which are seen as part of the celebrity background. Second, for populism, coding resulted in three categories: “unity with the people,” “us (good people) versus them (bad elite),” and “the people as the ones who should have political power.”



▲ Figure 1.

Visual representation of categories that emerged from the analysis.

FINDINGS

The analysis showed that Škoro was using elements of celebrity politics and populism in his communication on Facebook after he announced his candidacy for the presidential elections in 2019. When it comes to celebrity politics, he often showed closeness with his fans who enjoyed his music and with his Facebook followers. In his posts, Škoro used direct and friendly phrases, such as “dear friends,” “my dears,” and “your Miro,³” to show

³ Miro is a hypocorism of Miroslav.

this connection. Moreover, through photos and videos, Škoro represented his fans as his political supporters. One example is the post with a video from his concert in which the audience chants "Škoro the president." In this way, he used his fans, the audience, as part of his celebrity capital, and tried to construct it as part of his political capital.

Another manifestation of the celebrity part of Škoro's life in connection with politics comes from his celebrity background. This mostly refers to his celebrity network and music. He posted his songs and videos of concerts held in June and July to prove his honesty and reliability as a future president. One of the interesting examples is the post from December 2, 2019⁴, which contains a short video in which Škoro and his campaign staff are counting collected signatures for the presidential candidacy while singing his song with the following lyrics: "Every drop of sweat on my face was worth it. It was worth it because today God is blessing us." In this way, Škoro is using the lyrics of his famous song, his celebrity capital, to describe the political context and present himself as honest. He emphasized the fact that the work that was done was hard, but "it was worth it." The song that connects his fans with him in the context of entertainment is used here to emphasize that connection in the other context, the political one. Besides his music, music videos, and concerts, photos that show closeness with his celebrity friends were also present during the analyzed period. These photos can be read connotatively: His celebrity friends support him in his political plans. This demonstrates how Škoro, as a celebrity politician, still used celebrity endorsements from other celebrities, which is a very common tactic in political campaigns. One of the example can be seen in the post from July 31, 2019⁵, where Škoro poses with famous Croatian actor Vedran Mlikota at the celebration of Mlikota's 50th birthday.

Populism was manifested through all defined elements, and it was found that Škoro fitted well in Mudde's definition presented in the theoretical section, as he was dividing "the people" and "the elite," presenting "them" as the elite, i.e., current politicians, and even in one post mentioning all the politicians in the last 20 years since Croatia gained independence, as bad, unfair, corrupted, and so on. Furthermore, he was presenting "the people" as those who are good, who should be in power, and who should be able to express their will directly in referendums. His main message was present in most of the posts, such as "let's return the state to the people," implicating that elites have stolen the state from the people. These findings demonstrate how Škoro uses all these populist ideas. In short, he is not only using a populist communication style where he appeals to the voters, but he is also a "real" populist in terms of the ideational approach.

Even though Škoro was in the past connected to the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, not only by singing in campaign rallies for them, but also as a member of the parliament for 6 months, he represented himself as one of the people. This is not a specific case, as this has occurred with many populists. Mudde describes them as "outsider-elites: connected to the elites, but not part of them" (Mudde, 2004, p. 561).

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/MiroslavSkoroofficial/videos/617264818810024/>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/MiroslavSkoroofficial/posts/pfbid022XSL6LgvrkAqmH5gCsP25oG1BgEPm4Sj4RodpAaxGFSvg1Dm6eu8XUXqjSKzqwsXl>

As the goal of this research was to see how celebrity politics and populism can be combined in political communication through social media, the last step in the analysis was to examine how the categories from the two clusters merged. Only several Facebook posts in the analyzed period combined categories from both clusters, as celebrity politics and populism each dominated particular posts. However, the few cases in which one post had elements of both were of great relevance for this research, as those are the ones that help obtain a clear understanding of the ways celebrity capital emphasizes populist ideas.

FANS AS “THE PEOPLE”

The Facebook post that Škoro published on July 21, 2019⁶, consists of a 1) video that shows a part of the concert he held the day before the post was published, 2) the textual element of the post, and 3) emojis.

In the video, the focus is on the audience – fans. They came to Škoro’s concert. They are embraced in a hug, and some of them are on the stage with Škoro. They sing along with him the song. One can feel the emotion of unity while watching the video. In the textual part of the post, these fans are constructed as “the people” because Škoro writes: “With my people in the beautiful town of Stolac. Thanks for another wonderful night!”

Consequently, the written text adds stronger emphasis on the meaning, constructing Škoro’s fans as “the people” with whom he had a “wonderful night.” Moreover, emojis are used in this post to highlight the construction of unity.

“The people”, written in the text, is a populist element, and the video fits into the category of “celebrity work” from the celebrity politics cluster. Škoro is, therefore, in this post, connecting “the people” with his audience, thus connecting elements of celebrity politics and populism. Starini and Trillò (2021) similarly found that Mateo Salvini refers to his Instagram followers as “friends.” The connection between fandom and politics was mentioned in the work of van Zoonen (2004, p. 49), who said, “fan communities and political constituencies bear crucial similarities”, while Street (2004, p. 441) argued that “politicians become stars, politics becomes a series of spectacles and the citizens become spectators.”

Citizens can be fans of a politician, but these findings suggest that they can also be constructed as voters. Surely, not all Škoro’s fans would choose him in elections, but Škoro is trying to represent his audience as his “people”, those who he stands for and fights for in the political arena – those who should vote for him.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/MiroslavSkoroofficial/videos/436780166934596>

CELEBRITY BACKGROUND AS PROOF OF UNITY WITH THE PEOPLE

A Facebook post published on June 25, 2019⁷ shows an example of the mixture of populist elements with Škoro's "celebrity work" which is, in this specific case, his famous song from 2008 named "Homeland" (*Domovina*). The post is multimodal, and besides 1) the textual part and 2) the video, 3) the emoji of the Croatian flag is also used, which makes the meaning constructed through this Facebook post even stronger and more evident.

The posted song is an example of how Škoro uses his celebrity capital to prove his position as a patriot, connecting the song with the context of Statehood Day, an important national day in Croatia. Music is in this case used to communicate his beliefs and personality, and this power of music and musical taste is noted by van Zoonen, who sees it as an element that can express someone's lifestyle (van Zoonen, 2005, p. 43).

In the same post, he included a populist political message: "Dear friends, I congratulate you on Statehood Day with happiness. Next year, we will celebrate it together on a date that was established by the first Croatian president, dr. Franjo Tuđman, on 30 May. Like many other things, they have just taken that day from us. We will return the Statehood Day on 30 May, we will return the state to the People, and nothing can stop us on that way."

Škoro is in the "us versus them" discourse, presenting himself as one of "us," the people. Not only is he one of them, which he also tries to emphasize by using his song, but he also proves it by representing himself as their friend, addressing those who read his post as "dear friends."

He also calls for returning the state to the people, which implies that the people are the ones who should have the power, and the state was taken away from them by the elites. It is again populist, as direct democracy is a common characteristic that can be found in Mudde's (2004) definition, in particular, where it is claimed that populism "argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."

Therefore, this post shows very well how celebrity capital can be presented as part of populist ideas by using a mixture of different modes, as the video spot itself has a specific meaning when connected to the written part of the text.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Celebrity politics and populism are a good match, and analysis shows that they combine almost perfectly. While populist politicians may engage with popular culture or techniques known from the celebrity world to appear more ordinary or authentic, this study focused on the celebrity who uses existing celebrity capital to emphasize populist ideas and messages while transforming into a populist politician. Celebrity capital

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/MiroslavSkoroofficial/posts/pfbid029okdQ4FQrrNngnMivQP6FWKC6enRjSehK164BuvXN2bw6ydkID6vevp6vgUHkySI>

has proven to be especially useful for the populist aim of attracting attention. More importantly, celebrity capital can be beneficial for highlighting the connection with the people, who are central to populism.

The example of Miroslav Škoro clearly shows that he constructs the people through his songs – connecting his musical career with the political one, arguing that he proves his credibility by singing about these people to whom he now wants to give power. He used his fans, the audience, to show how the people were already giving him support, which was more visible in Škoro's Facebook communication in the first month after he announced his candidacy. People who attended his concerts before the official campaign started were all presented as "the people" on his Facebook, and Škoro did not miss the opportunity to put focus on those of them who explicitly expressed their political support for him. Using the different modes Facebook posts offer, Škoro emphasizes with the written text the elements of his music or concerts, constructing an additional meaning to it and equalizing his fans and followers who love his music with "the people" from the populist idea.

Another point I want to argue here is that Škoro's Facebook page is also a part of his celebrity capital. It was created for his celebrity career, which means his fans were most probably following it, and they were already there when he rebranded that Facebook page into a political one. He even announced his candidacy there, sharing his YouTube video. Therefore, it is concluded that using celebrity capital to underline populist ideas could have a significant advantage because celebrities already have an important connection with the people who are central to populism.

This paper brings a deeper understanding of the celebrity populists' communication and the way celebrity capital can be combined with populism. The study helps to understand how this specific type of politician communicates to obtain a political position and how celebrity populism may be used in political communication and political marketing. Nevertheless, many other forms of celebrity populism and types of celebrity populists or populist celebrities were excluded from this analysis. It is suggested here that celebrity populism is a topic worth further study. It is important to expand it to different cases to obtain more information regarding the way the two phenomena combine. Although this study examines Škoro's communication through social media and focuses on his self-presentation, that does not mean that mainstream mass media should not be considered. On the contrary, the way mainstream media represent celebrity populists remains an important line of research worth pursuing.

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ZVIJEZDE KOJE POSTAJU POPULISTI: CELEBRITY POPULIZAM MIROSLAVA ŠKORE TIJEKOM PREDsjedničke KAMPANJE U HRVATSKOJ 2019. GODINE

Silvija Vuković

SAŽETAK *Populisti koji se ponašaju kao zvijezde i zvijezde (celebrities) koji ulaze u politiku i postaju populisti, fenomen je koji ilustrira kako se u suvremenoj političkoj komunikaciji populizam i celebrity politika mogu jednostavno kombinirati. Cilj je ovoga rada bolje razumjeti potonji tip takozvanih celebrity populista i to analizom Facebook objava hrvatskoga glazbenika i populističkoga političara Miroslava Škore tijekom predsjedničke kampanje 2019. Provedena kvalitativna analiza sadržaja pokazala je da celebrity populizam pridonosi produbljanju populističkog obraćanja „narodu“, i to tako što se već postojeći celebrity kapital koristi da bi se to naglasilo. To je vidljivo u dvije glavne kategorije koje proizlaze iz analize: 1) predstavljanje svojih obožavatelja kao „naroda“ i 2) korištenje pozadine iz celebrity svijeta kao dokaza jedinstva s narodom.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

CELEBRITY POPULIZAM, POPULIZAM, CELEBRITY POLITIKA, POLITIČKA KOMUNIKACIJA

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