July 4, 2020 – Jaime Williams

**Rather believed or not, celebrities have a huge influence on our society**

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

A graph illustrating the percentages of people’s influence in our society.

(Google Images/The Black Explosion)

Celebrities have always had an influence on social and political matters in society, which is why people turn to them when there is a change that needs to be made.

“When it comes to a community crisis, I think most people want their idols to speak on their behalf. Whoever you look up to, whoever is your hero, whoever holds the most influence, etc., - we typically expect those people to speak on our behalf, especially because their platforms are usually a lot larger than ours and they can reach many more people. We place so much power and expectation on these people (who are actually human, just like us) to use their platforms responsibly simply because of our admiration and love for them,” said owner and CEO of Milan360 Strategies, Jasmine Milan Murray.

CEO & Senior Publicist of Umanagement Public Relations, Milan Mobley said, “We always say we need people with impact to lead us, hence why we turn to our world leaders, but sadly those who are in office right now have constantly failed us. We believe we have no one left to make major changes besides our celebrities and influencers. It makes sense though, we see these same people on social media who can get you to jump in a challenge so easily – so we “know” they can push change, right? That’s the narrative we’ve created.”

Lately, we have seen many use their influence to back up causes such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

“A lot of celebrities have used their voices for the Black Lives Matter cause in several ways. For example, protesting, speaking, sharing, and teaching others that may not have been aware of what has been going on for hundreds of years,” said Multiplatform Programming Specialist for NBC, Monica Smothers.

Murray said “Some celebrities have used their platform in a powerful way by calling out other celebrities and even large corporations who have refused to “put their money where their mouth is” for so many years. I love that so many people are charging large companies to add more brown and black people to their executive boards and more. This only happened because celebrities decided to speak out against the unjust actions that take place in their industry every day and have been taking place for years.”

Their opinions matter in our society because they carry more weight and can impact a wider audience, therefore, getting more people to follow their lead. In turn, this gets people, companies and more to change their behavior because they know that celebrities can get their fans to stop buying into them figuratively and physically.

When it comes to who gets deemed a celebrity, it all boils down to the people and the media.

Murray said, “The public absolutely makes people celebrities. The industry can find someone and add their strategy to provide the context and likeable features that consumers like, but the public has the authority to determine what they like, what they want to see, and ultimately determine who has celebrity status.”

With social media being a huge powerhouse in our culture today, celebrities are being made and discovered at a much faster rate than they were in the past.

Social media is also giving them an easier and quicker way to get their voices heard.

There are several positives and negatives to celebrities having a say so in our society.

Mobley said, “The positive is that they have large platforms to make change, and to bring light on to certain issues. The negative is that not all of them are capable of properly articulating their emotions and feelings in a way that it is positively received to the public.”

Murray said, “when a celebrity irresponsibly tries to speak on behalf of a particular community and fails to communicate what needs to be translated for our best interest, it sets us back.”

Now celebrities aren’t the only ones who can speak on an issue. Regular everyday people can make a change and speak on issues as well, it’s just that celebrities have a larger platform, so their voices tend to get heard first among many.

Yet, there are many people who do and do not want celebrities to have as much power as they do.

Smothers said, “I don’t think there is anything wrong with allowing celebrities to help with being a strong voice to our society, especially if it is to help spread positivity and a strong message, one with meaning and passion. I think what I would like to see is more people in general holding themselves accountable and responsible for things that they want to see changed and not just “wait” and stand by for someone such as a celebrity to do so. People need to start becoming their own advocate for change.

Murray said, “regular people have to understand their influence, the same way celebrities have to understand their influence, and we all have to make decisions wisely in terms of who we give power to.”

All in all, we can learn from those who have an influence in our society.

“There are some like Amanda Seales, who I feel is always a controversial voice of the celeb community, but the girl does her research. She is extremely knowledgeable about African American history, and always uses her many platforms to advocate for black and brown people….Another one that I’ve been following quite often is Marsai Martin. For her to be so young, she is such a pleasant, humble, and educated young lady. She has been advocating strongly for black people’s safety on her social platforms. She understands the influence of her platform, and she adds action behind it to promote a cause that we all support,” said Murray.

Smothers said, “what we can learn from celebrities who have an influence in our society is to keep on fighting for what you believe in no matter how long it takes. A lot of celebrities have stories of how they became a part of the industry and most didn’t have silver spoons handed to them. In fact, a lot of them were probably at one time fighting to be heard, seen, and just taken seriously all for the simple fact of doing something that they love. That is something that I hope one day more people will learn to adapt to. Rome wasn’t built in one day and neither will things change in a blink of an eye. Patience is the key and strong belief in what it is that you want in life.”