



CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT AND CUSTOMERS' PURCHASE OF SMARTPHONES IN YENAGOA METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

The literature recognises celebrities as social influencers. As influencers, celebrities possess the capacity to modulate followers' decisions. This paper investigates celebrities' role in purchasing smartphones in Yenagoa, Nigeria. Five specific objectives were stated in this study. Five (5) hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study based on celebrities' attributes. The survey research method was adopted for these study. 350 copies of a semi-structured and self-administered questionnaire were distributed to conveniently selected residents of Yenagoa Bayelsa state; with the aid of SPSS 23.0, multiple linear regression was employed to test the formulated hypotheses at a 5% level of significance. The report shows that celebrity endorsement accounts for about 52% increase in sales of smartphones. Specifically, all the celebrity attributes exhibits a positive relationship with customers' purchase of smartphones. The research further reports that all the celebrity attributes except celebrity cultural beliefs had a significant relationship with the purchase of smartphones. This paper recommends that marketing managers be cautious in choosing celebrities for product endorsement purposes if their aspiration for marketplace dominance is to be achieved.

KEYWORDS: Celebrities Attributes, Celebrity Endorsement, Nigeria, Smartphones, Yenagoa

INTRODUCTION

The entrance of smartphones helped to displace the hitherto handheld dominance of the Nigerian telephone market. Smartphones, like their name, are highly sophisticated multi-functional electronic devices. Due to its ease of use and multi-functional attributes, it has become among its users' most sought-after telecom gadgets. Arising from the low rate of market penetration in Africa, manufacturers of smartphones have to seek more creative advertising avenues to secure customers' patronage. Celebrity endorsement emerged as the new advertising option. This new advertising practice is believed to be highly primed to influence customers' purchases. The persons often considered celebrities are very visible in the media. Marketing managers' choice of these media personalities is premised on the desire to leverage



their large followership. In short, marketing managers choose these personalities with the expectation that brand acceptance will be positively influenced.

The activities involved in the choice of an endorser demand much caution, as the consequences of a wrong selection could be catastrophic (Ewanlen, Obeki & Enani, 2018). This caution notwithstanding, the usage of notable Nigerian celebrities has become the new craving among smartphone manufacturers. This is evident as major cities in Nigeria are adorned with very large electronic billboards displaying stars as endorsers of smartphones. The study is considered germane as the outcome will greatly benefit marketing firms, present and potential endorsees and marketing scholars. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, several studies in Nigeria focused on the purchase of smartphones. In particular, Ayodele and Ifenyichuckwu (2016) study examined the drivers of customers' purchase of smartphones in Nigeria. However, this study sought to establish the roles celebrities play in purchasing smartphones. This study examines how efficiently celebrity endorsement creates brand awareness and increases sales. The specific objectives are to;

1. verify the influence of celebrity trustworthiness on customer purchase of smartphones,
2. examine the role of celebrity attractiveness on consumer purchase of smartphones,
3. establish the nexus between celebrity expertise and customers' purchase of smartphones,
4. determine the influence of celebrity-product matchup on consumer purchase of smartphones and
5. ascertain the influence of celebrity cultural background on consumer purchase of smartphones.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrities are people who have access to media coverage. Persons considered celebrities are creations of their various vocations. Notable personalities from the sports arena, the television and entertainment industries form the bulk of celebrities. Celebrities possess unique and distinguishing characteristics as they are often associated with pleasant personalities. Kotler (2009) conceives product endorsement as a tool enabling celebrities to function as ambassadors. These persons leverage their media exposure and nature to certify a brand's claim and position. Similarly, Jeyapalan (2015) recognises celebrity endorsement as a mass communication practice organisations adopt to create alertness and gain favourable consumer feedback.

The practice of celebrity endorsement enables a firm to distinguish its brand from contemporary brands in the marketplace. In most cases, this practice creates a pull on consumers' attitudes towards the product (Ogunsiji, 2012). However, Ahmed, Farooq and Iqbal (2014) believe that celebrity endorsement is the best tool for an advertisement for a large audience as it is expected to gain customers' attention. Erdogan (1999) posits that celebrity endorsement practice significantly affects firms' financial returns and serves as a tool for competition.



Till and Shimp (1998) believed that despite the risks associated with using celebrity endorsement, organisations have continuously embraced the practice of celebrity endorsement. Ultimately, the principal purpose of celebrity endorsement is to attract customers' attention and gain a market niche (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014). Furthermore, Liu (2009) remarks that the huge expenditure incurred in endorsing a celebrity suggests that organisations must thoroughly scrutinise the entire programme to achieve its intended goals. Ogunsiji (2012) observed that organisations' inability to plan and execute their programmes of celebrity selection rigorously often result in endorsement failing to meet firms' expectations. It is, however, the belief of Apejaye (2013) that, when conscientiously implemented, celebrities' endorsement can contribute to building brand equity and consequently enhance firms' competitive position. The inherent benefits of celebrity endorsement notwithstanding, the prohibitive cost of endorsing celebrities often impedes firms from embracing this practice.

Celebrities Attributes

Ibok (2013) and ZorBari-Nwitambu and Kalu (2017) identified celebrities' attributes that could enhance celebrity endorsement's effectiveness. Some of these attributes are examined hereafter. Literature acknowledges that celebrity trustworthiness is an important factor in celebrity endorsement. Pamdey (2011) identified reliability, dependability, honesty, and sincerity as components of trustworthiness. The place of an endorser's trustworthiness is not in doubt. Ahmed, Farooq and Iqbal (2014) study revealed that firms could only derive a competitive advantage by endorsing a celebrity with high credibility. The credibility of a celebrity can be ascertained through thorough scrutiny of the reputation, popularity, public image and trustworthiness. Shimp (2007) asserts that audience trust in an endorser is large due to the celebrity's personal and professional life. The place of celebrity trustworthiness is not in contention, as O'Mahony and Meenaghan (1997) acknowledged that trustworthiness is a major component of source credibility. Source credibility can affect attitudinal change in consumers. The authors remark that the absence of trustworthiness renders the other celebrity attributes ineffectual in changing consumers' attitudes.

Furthermore, Miller and Baseheart (1969) study found that communicators who are not trusted have an insignificant impact on the audience. This implies that communication that emanates from a trustworthy source will probably initiate a larger attitude change. In other words, the source of communication can modify consumers' beliefs, opinions, attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). Also, Friedman, Santeramo and Traina (1978) study found a strong association between celebrity likeness and trust. The implication is that the higher consumers' believability of a celebrity message, the better consumers' attitude towards the brand. However, Ohanian (1991) argues that celebrity trustworthiness had no relationship with consumer purchase intentions. This finding suggests that negative information associated with an endorser can adversely affect his believability. Ultimately, this will have a ripple effect on the brand image and sales of the product.

Interestingly, Sliburyte (2009) study reveals that gender positively affects the believability of communications that emanate from celebrities. Specifically, the study reports that women tend to trust female celebrities more than male celebrities. Similarly, the position of a product in its life cycle notwithstanding, using celebrities would achieve the same amount of customer trust (Sutter & Kocher, 2007). Arising from the preceding, this paper hypothesised that;



Celebrity Attractiveness

The concept of attractiveness does not only entail physical attractiveness; rather, it connotes, among others, intellectual skills, personality properties, way of living, athletic performances and skills (Joseph, 1982). Similarly, Langmeyer and Shank (1994) conceptualise celebrity attractiveness as an all-embracing phenomenon that is not limited to physical or facial beauty; instead, it includes beauty, charm, grace, and intelligence. In short, a celebrity's physical attractiveness can be deduced from the characteristics that consumers may perceive in endorsers. Celebrities' attractiveness can draw more favourable remarks and cultivate greater attitudinal beliefs than less attractive communicators (Till & Busler, 1998; Ohanian, 1991).

Consumers consider a celebrity' attractive principally from these persons' outstanding performances in their vocations. As a result of this outstanding performance, people become attracted to and have respect for them. Cohen and Golden (1972) posit that consumers who consider celebrities as role models would want to identify with the endorser. There are, however, instances where endorsers' appeal may need to be more attractive but do possess the image the company desire and create endorsed. Worthy of note is that when there is congruency between a brand and a celebrity, the general appeal of the celebrity is of little relevance in celebrity choice. Several scholars found relationships between physical attractions and evaluations and the likeability of a brand (Shimp, 2007; Till & Busler, 1998). This implies that celebrities' attractiveness positively influences consumers' attitudes towards a brand. Furthermore, Oyeniyi (2014) reports that celebrity personae positively influence a brand's image. Consequently, this paper hypothesises that,

Celebrity Expertise

Expertise in this context refers to celebrity product knowledge and experience. However, several synonyms have been used in literature to describe expertise. In particular, Magnini, Honeycutt and Cross (2008) used authoritativeness, competence and qualification in place of expertise. To Erdogan (1999), expertise connotes an endorser's knowledge, experience, and skills. This implies the level of public perception of the celebrity as a valid source of information. Expertise in this context does not connote specialism in a specific field. The implication is that celebrities selected to endorse brands should have the requisite knowledge. Simply put, celebrities are considered experts when they endorse products that closely relate to the areas that make them popular (Biswas, Biswas & Das, 2006). McCracken (1989) affirms that the higher the expertise of a celebrity, the greater his confidence to make valid assertions. More importantly, the knowledge and experience of the endorser elicit a more favourable response from consumers.

Moreover, Silvera and Austad (2004) study revealed that a celebrity's expertise directly relates to the validity of celebrity assertions concerning a product. This finding implies that expert opinion is recognised as a vital force in driving the persuasiveness of marketing messages. Based on product nature, Ohanian (1991) posited that the expertise of an endorser does not matter in persuading and influencing consumers.



Celebrity Product Match

The concept of celebrity product matchup refers to firms' effect at striking a balance between a celebrity's characteristics and a product's desired image. Arora and Sahu (2014) remarked that a firm's attempt at achieving a celebrity product matchup is to nurture and develop the brand's image. Firms' ultimate desire to achieve a proper match between the image and values of celebrities with those of customers and the brand is the cardinal principle behind celebrity endorsement. Similarly, Erdogan (1999) asserts that a seamless blend of personal celebrity characteristics with brand attributes is ideal for meaningful endorsements. Interestingly, Kamins (1990) hypothesised that attractive celebrities are more effective when used to endorse products that enhance one's attractiveness.

Experience has shown that managers' desire for congruency between celebrity and product is for image transfer. In essence, a matchup is successful when there is congruence between the features of a celebrity and a brand. Ohanian (1991) reported that a successful match fit should result in customers' favourable perception of the brand. Consequently, a significant relationship must be established between the celebrity, the consumer and the product for an endorsement to be effective. Michael (1989) study and much later Erdogan (1999) concluded that a successful matchup is strongly dependent upon the amount of congruence between a brand and a celebrity. However, Evans (1988) warned that the absence of a unique and identifiable relationship between celebrity and product could result in a vampire effect. Arising from the consequences of the vampire effect, marketing managers often watch out for a situation where the image and acceptance of an endorser are independent of the product.

Celebrity Cultural Belief

The culture of people is often seen as a way of life. In other words, culture can also be considered a manner of doing things. In most cases, culture refers to a person's traditions, norms and religion. The truth is that the culture of a people has become so important that it is granted a prominent place in consumer behaviour studies. In Africa, culture serves as a basis of association. As a result, marketing managers, in selecting potential endorsers, often consider the cultural beliefs and values of these personalities. Experience has shown that people of a particular culture are, in most cases, emotionally attached to a celebrity that shares similar cultural heredity. To the audience, a celebrity is regarded as one of their own when they speak the same language and dress. Similarly, the religious inclination of a celebrity and the audience is very important in ascertaining celebrity endorsement's effectiveness. The religious belief of a consumer influences his consumption of goods and services.

Solomon (1996) remarked that the ability of customers to find a basis for relating with the endorser determines the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement to a great extent. Basil (1996) believes that when marketing communication targets specific ethnic groups, the endorser's ethnic background should be carefully evaluated. In Northern Nigeria, for instance, any advert targeted at the audience would gain greater acceptance if the company engages the services of a Muslim celebrity for this purpose (ZorBari-Nwitambu & Kalu, 2017). Similarly, a female Muslim celebrity wearing a hijab will appeal more to Muslim faithful who share similar faith and belief with such a celebrity. This suggests that organisation managers need to the



conscious of the ethnic background of the celebrities to convey messages targeted at certain ethnic groups.

METHODOLOGY

The correlational research design method was adopted for this study. The method enabled the researcher to collect and analyse quantitative data. The residents in Yenagoa Bayelsa state, Nigeria, form the population of this study. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2016), the population of the Yenagoa metropolis is 386,344. A sample size of 350 was scientifically ascertained with the formula used by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009). A semi-structured questionnaire made up of two sections served as the research instrument. Section A consist of the age, gender, educational qualification, religious inclination and vocations of respondents, while section B. consists of items measuring celebrity attributes of trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, match- up and cultural belief. The research instrument was self-administered in collaboration with two research assistants in three strategic locations in the Yenagoa metropolis. The researchers adopted the convenience method in data collection. Of the 350 questionnaires administered, 320 were retrieved, and 300 were found useful. This represents about an 86% return rate. The study adopted and modified Eytayo (2017) study to evaluate trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise and match- as well as ZorBari-Nwitambu and Kalu (2017) study for cultural belief. This study relied on Crow, Chen Yeow and Wong (2012) to measure drivers of customer purchase of smartphones. All the statements in section B of the research instrument were stated on a 5-point likert type scale. The respondents were expected to respond to the statements using options that range from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). A simple percentage was employed for descriptive data presentation. With the aid of SPSS version 23, multiple linear regression was used to test the formulated hypotheses at a 5% significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Test of Hypotheses

Table 1: Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis (Celebrity trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, matchup and cultural belief and Customers purchase)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.678	.589	.519	3740.15

As seen in Table 1, the coefficient of determination (R) =.678 and an adjusted $R^2 = 0.519$. This implies that firms' use of celebrities can account for about a 52 % increase in sales of smartphones. This result implies that other factors can lead to about a 48% increase in the purchase of smartphones. This finding corroborates Odia and Agbonifoh (2017) study that found effective marketing communication, product price, product design, maintenance and functionality as the principal determinants of product sales.



Table 2: Multiple Regression Coefficients (Celebrity trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise and matchup and cultural belief and Customers Purchase)

	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.134	.512		11.625	.000
Trustworthiness	.397	.228	.264	3.423	.001
Attractiveness	.514	.285	.191	2.118	.035
Expertise	.471	.259	.343	9.721	.000
Match up	.805	.629	.008	.180	.007
Cultural belief	.225	.115	.058	1.626	.095

As seen in Table 2, multiple regression coefficients were used to establish the relationship between celebrity attributes and customers' purchase of smartphones. The result indicates that all the celebrity attributes exhibit a direct and positive relationship with customers' purchase of smartphones. Also, the finding shows that all the celebrity attributes except celebrity cultural beliefs had a significant relationship with the purchase of smartphones. These findings show that celebrity trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and matchup have a significant positive relationship. In contrast, celebrity cultural belief has a positive but insignificant relationship with customers' purchase of smartphones. The findings of this study are as generally expected. The study affirms the social influence role of celebrities. In addition, this study shows that trustworthiness reports a positive and significant relationship with the purchase of smartphones. This corroborates Friedman, Santeramo and Traina (1979) study that found a positive relationship between celebrity likeness, trust and purchase behaviour. The possible explanation may be connected with the nature of the product, study location and the specific endorsee.

Furthermore, celebrity expertise positively and significantly affects customers' smartphone purchases. This finding is not unexpected, as celebrity expertise is demonstrated in product knowledge. This knowledge, in most cases, arises from consistent product usage. This experiential knowledge ultimately confers confidence in the celebrity, which is expected to be transferred to their followers. Similarly, celebrity public appeal is equally of great concern to marketers. Similarly, this study reports that celebrity attractiveness significantly influences customers' purchase of smartphones. This finding upholds Eyitayo (2017) research that asserts that the higher a celebrity's pleasant appeal, the greater its ability to increase customers' purchases. This suggests that the greater the match between a celebrity and the firm's desired image, the higher the expected sales. Finally, the cultural belief of celebrities was also examined. This study found that though a positive relationship exists, it is insignificant. This outcome negates Zorbari-Nwitambu and Kalu (2017) research that found a positive and significant relationship between celebrity cultural belief and an increase in the purchase. Cultural diversity and the location of the respondents could be the most probable reasons for this contradictory finding.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Literature asserts that social influence is why firms resort to celebrities for product endorsements. The envisioned transference of positive celebrity heightens these attributes to products. The seamless transfer of these attributes to customers results in purchasing products that these celebrities endorse. In other words, firms' deployment of celebrity endorsement as a marketing communication tool is hinged on the transfer of positive celebrity attributes that the customers admire to the product. However, it is important that the celebrity image be the same as the organisation's coverts.

This study sought to explore the role of celebrity endorsement in the purchase of smartphones. The research found that the use of celebrities positively simulates the sales of smartphones. Specifically, the study reports that celebrity attributes exhibit a direct and positive relationship with customers' purchase of smartphones. The research further reports that all the celebrity attributes except celebrity cultural beliefs had a significant relationship with the purchase of smartphones. In light of these findings, it is pertinent to advise marketing managers to be cautious in choosing celebrities for product endorsement purposes. What matters to consumers is the consistency of character rather than essentially popularity.

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