STRATEGIC ADVERTISING COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA'S TELECOMMUNICATION SECTOR: ASSESSING CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT AND BRAND PREFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated customers' perception of Celebrity Endorsement and Consumer Brand Preference in the telecommunication industry. A sample size of 384 customers of telecommunication services was determined using random sampling. Copies of structured questionnaire were administered and the retrieved data was analysed using regression analysis. The result of the study revealed that the dimensions of celebrity endorsement, such as celebrity image, trustworthiness and expertise had their different levels of impact on brand preference dimensions, including, consumer brand loyalty, brand association and perceived quality. The study concluded that celebrity endorsement has a role to play in consumer brand preference. Conclusions and Implications were established in the study.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Consumer Brand Preference, Telecommunication.

INTRODUCTION

The engagement of renowned personalities is a common form of bringing awareness of new and existing products used by organizations to improve their market shares, increase sales, and add value to their products. By engaging the endorsement form, the organizational manager attempts to stimulate consumers' interest and their preference for their brands through the use of well-known celebrities during advertising campaigns (Huang & Emine, 2012). The rate at which it is used as a tool for strategic marketing communication has drastically increased over time. This is because celebrities are known to have built a personal image that people have an attraction to. The growth of celebrity endorsement is universal to all sectors or industries. Statistics from the United States reveal that 25% of all advertisements in newspapers and magazines employ the use of famous personalities (Escalas & Bettman, 2015).

In the world of today, consumers treat their favourite celebrities as models or idols (Freire et al., 2018). It is also a fact that consumers tend to emulate their lifestyles as related to their favourite renowned personalities (Sambath & Jyh-Fu, 2015). This creates an impact on the consumers because they carry a psychological notion that using the products/brand endorsed by their favourite celebrity, means that they are of a similar social class and would likely possess similar physical attributes, for example, skin colour, as their preferred celebrity (Carlsona et al.,

2020). Thus, their buying preferences are being influenced (Ogunsiji, 2012). According to Blech and Blech (2008), organizations primarily use celebrity endorsement strategy to gain high brand visibility, admiration, attention and to stimulate customers' interest in their brands. The enlistment of renowned personalities is a veritable tool for bringing about product awareness, with the celebrities seen as having more influence than anonymous models and campaigns because they verbalize the meaning of the personality concerning the brand (Mukherjee, 2009).

In a global market where technology is advancing, the role of advertising is very important in influencing the interest of consumers towards specific brands, it has become a necessity for companies to use all means to influence and bring awareness to the consumer through effective advertising. Literature on the strategic advertising communication, has shown that the use of famous personalities for product awareness generates a lot of publicity. But the translation of high publicity to effective interest in a brand and actual purchase together with increased market share remains a gap that existing studies on the relationship between strategic advertising communication and customer brand preference have not, hitherto, been able to justify with empirical evidence.

Organizations in the Nigerian telecommunication industry do not get the required attention of consumers on their brands as their market share still does not increase significantly (Stork, 2011; Nwokah & Nwulu, 2015). This is evidenced by Etisalat that spends 190 million on celebrity endorsement and the porting activities to Etisalat are 11,136 and the statistics are 6,551 and all this does not have any significant impact on their market share which is (13,14%) (NCC, 2017). Despite huge investment that has been made to compare the parallels between organization products and renown personality in the belief that it would help create/bring attention to the product/service being supported and also transfer values to the products/service through the popularity of the celebrity. Therefore, this research is focused on investigating the influence of celebrity endorsement influences consumer brand preference.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Celebrities can attract attention which can motivate consumers preference when their image is attached to a product (Saleem, 2017). While managers with experience would tend to trust the impact of celebrity endorsement would work, it is however difficult to measure whether the sales figure are as a result of the product or endorsement (Dzisah & Ocloo, 2018).

McCracken (1989) proposed a model of stimulating customers' perception of celebrity endorsement. According to his model, a celebrity's effectiveness as an endorser depends on the socially obtained meaning he/she conveys to the endorsement process. Each celebrity conveys many meanings including status, class, gender, age, and also identity and way of life. In his study of media commercials, specifically TV commercials that have their coverage across the US, Europe, and in Africa, it was established that the most viewed commercials have the following attributes:

I.   Humor: incorporating the use of humor in adverts builds viewer happiness and involvement.
II.   Music: 50 percent of advert that are classified as watchable have music as a vital component (Dzisah, &Ocloo, 2018).

Influence of Celebrity Image on Brand Loyalty

The idea of celebrity image entails not only physical attractiveness, but includes knowledgeable skills, character properties, way of living, athletic performance, and emotional

skills (Ibidunni et al., 2017). Celebrities are attractive because of their great established performance, which creates respect for their achievement and thus followership. Physical attractiveness creates a persuasion and as a result, consumer wants to identify themselves with the endorser (Min et al., 2019). However, some celebrities are less attractive but represent the image the organization wants to create. When there is a matchup between the brand and the celebrity attractiveness becomes less important.

Ibidunni et al. (2018a) affirmed that the image of the celebrity does not depend only on physical beauty but may also depend on their level of intelligence. Marketing theorists identify physical attractiveness as one of the standards for selecting endorsers since it can influence the attitude of consumers to adverts and the product (Vdovita & Mujahid, 2018). Therefore, using attractive endorsers is preferable to using the less attractive celebrities. Yet, other researchers have argued that attractive celebrity endorsements are the elements of effective product advertisements (Misra et al., 2019). As a result that physical attractiveness is an informational cue; it involves effects that are delicate, persistent, certain, and produces a definite pattern of verifiable differences and transcends culture.

Ozer et al. (2020) argued that consumers buy brands or associates themselves with brand that are in agreement with their selves (actual, ideal, or social self) because they buy these products for the symbolic meaning the brands have.

When a product has a good image, the consumers will believe that the product is a good brand. This increases the trust of the consumer for the brand and also has a positive effect on brand loyalty Bernarto et al. (2020). Taqi & Muhammad (2020) argued that one of the way consumers interact and communicate with a brand is when the consumers percieved that the brabd has a good and strong image. Thus it promotes relationship with the consumer and repurchase intentions.

> H_1	Celebrity image influences brand loyalty

Influence of Celebrity Trustworthiness on Brand Association

A celebrity can be said to be trustworthy if he/she has the following qualities; honesty, integrity, and believability (Hoekman, 2013). Organizations always look out for celebrities who are trustworthy and dependable (Jyothi & Laishram, 2018). Trustworthiness is the most important criterion for the credibility of a celebrity (Abdaziz et al., 2019). Product advertisers usually creates the highest effect by taking these two qualities, trustworthiness and likeability (Hoekman, 2013).

Singh & Banerjee (2018) emphasized that the trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser has no effect on the purchase intentions of the related brand by the consumer. Trustworthiness is a major importance for effective endorsers. According to (Rachbini, 2018) if consumers believe in their trusted celebrity testimonies, then the credibility of the advert is higher and the chances of positive brand patronage are higher. Once a celebrity comes negatively to the public, this can affect the credibility and reliability of the celebrity. Also, it could counter the impact of the brand preference and sales of the product (Samarasinghe, 2018).

Celebrity trustworthiness has been proven to significantly impact brand association. For example, most consumers connect their lifestyles with the brand and compare their personality with that of the brand (Satria et al., 2019). Consequently, customers initiate a connection between their lifestyle and that of the brand linkage between their lifestyle and that of brand regardless of price, availability, or any other factors (Ibidunni et al., 2014; Sabunwala, 2013).

Celebrity trustworthiness can be said to be effective if the message and the speaker (celebrity) is accepted by the consumer (Sudradjat & Wahid, 2020). Celebrity trustworthiness is the degree to how the consumers see that the celebrity can transfer a sense of honesty, believability, and integrity through advertising (Ibrahim, 2020). Celebrity trustworthiness affects the values, beliefs, opinions and behaviour of the consumer (Kumar & Ramana, 2019).

H_2 *Trustworthiness has a positive effect on brand association*

Relationship between Celebrity Expertise and Perceived Quality

Celebrity endorsement expertise can be defined as the extent to which a celebrity is seen to be the basis of a well-grounded statement (Trivedi, 2018). Consumers must believe in the expertise of a celebrity (Ismael & Ladkoo, 2018). The expert source also influences the perception of the product's quality (Parmar & Singhmann, 2019). The source or celebrity that is an expert is more persuasive and generates more purchase intentions (Chekima & Wafa, 2018). Moreover, Speck, Schumann (1988) and (Hennayake, 2017) specified that endorsers, who are experts in a distinctive area, will bring more awareness to the brand than endorsers who are not experts. The level of celebrity expertise will determine its effectiveness (Abbas et al., 2018). In other words, the more expertise a celebrity has, the more effective the message been passed across will be.
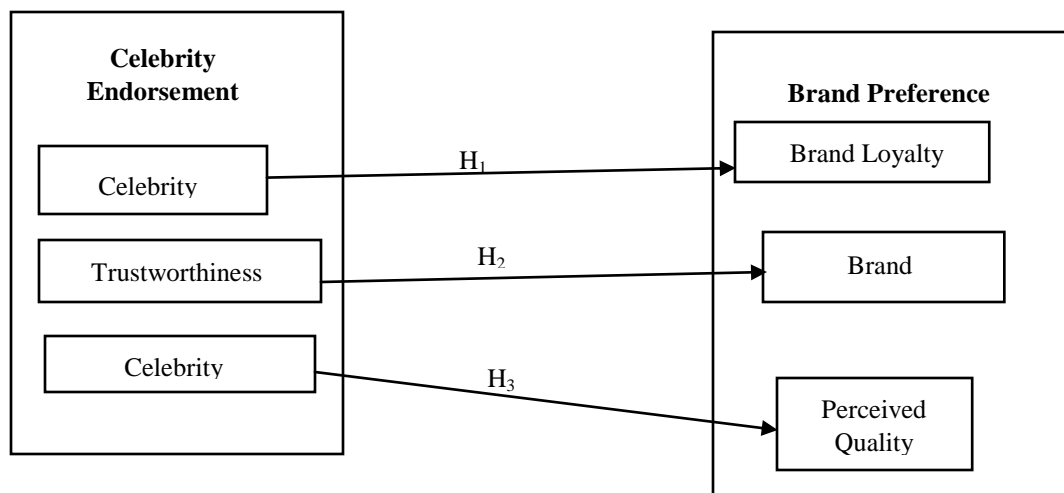

FIGURE 1
THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The expertise of a brand endorser can be defined as the extent to which a message source is said to be a source of valid testimonials (Shelton & Chiliya, 2014). Expertise can be defined as the experience, familiarity, or skills that are owned by the celebrity (Kohly & Augustine, 2019). However, sometimes the source must not necessarily be skilled with the product as long as the target audience perceives the endorser as an expert on the subject (Hasnain et al., 2018). An expert source influences the selling point of the product which is being endorsed. A brand endorser who is perceived as an expert is more persuasive and influences the purchase intentions compared to non-expert endorsers (Araigy, 2018).

Celebrity expertise can be defined as the control the endorser has over information, skills and experience (Khan et al., 2019; Ezebor et al., 2019). Consumers perceived celebrities to be responsible and reliable, so when they see a celebrity endorsing a brand, they transfer that credibility and reliability of the celebrity to the brand (Anand, 2019). The expertise of the celebrity affects the consumers because of the strong belief they have in the endorser (Odia & Oseremen, 2019).

H_3 There is a relationship between celebrity expertise and perceived quality

The research design (Figure 1) used for this research study is descriptive and it used a structured questionnaire to collect data from respondents and to study the impact of celebrity endorsement on consumer brand preference. The populace of this study are subscribers of telecommunication services in Lagos state Nigeria. The total populace derived is 184,426,187 (Nigerian Communication Commission, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Measures

The items used in the questionnaire for this research were drawn from existing research. The questionnaire was in two sections A, and B. section A contains questions about the respondent's demographic variables such as age, sex, gender, marital status, educational attainment, and nationality. Section B contains questions about the subject matter of the study under the operationalized variables. The 5- points summated rating scale known as the Likert scales using (Strongly Agree, Agree, undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

Sampling

The sample size for the present study was determined based on Godden's sample size formula. The justification for using this formula is that the population is infinite, that is the population greater than 50,000. The Godden formula is concerned with the application of normal approximation with 1.96 or 95% confidence level and 4% confidence interval. Consequently, a sample size of 384 respondents was determined for this study. This research used simple random sampling so that every respondent will have an equal chance of being included in the study.

Validity and Reliability

In determining the consistency of the instrument, the Cronbach's Alpha was being used to measure the reliability of the underlying dimensions i.e. convenience, efficient operation, privacy, and speed of operation (see Table 1). The questionnaire must be structured by the researcher, subjected to content and face validity to the researcher supervisor who would advise on item to content, reframed, rejected, or retained.

Based on the Cronbach Alpha table above, we can declare that the research instrument (questionnaire) is very reliable. The overall Cronbach Alpha for all items in the research instrument is a total value of 0.905/24 items. Which is within the range of acceptable values for reliability statistics using Cronbach Alpha analysis.

Table 1 RELIABILITY STATISTICS OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENT		
Items	**Reliability**	**No of items**
Celebrity image	0.720	3
Brand loyalty	0.796	3
Celebrity trustworthiness	0.832	4
Brand association	0.865	5
Celebrity expertise	0.875	5
Perceived quality	0.853	4

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Analysis

The questionnaires (research instrument) were distributed to three hundred and eighty-four (384) respondents that served as the sample size for the entire NCC industry. Of all the administered questionnaire, a total of three hundred and sixty-three (363) questionnaire which represents 94.5% were retrieved, and twenty-one (21) questionnaires which represents 5.4% were not retrieved.

Table 2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS		
Demographic Characteristics	**Frequency**	**%**
Gender		
Male	186	51.2
Female	177	48.8
Total	363	100.0
Age		
20 years and Below	119	32.8
21-30	131	36.1
31-40	58	16.0
41 and above	55	15.2
Total	363	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	251	69.1
Married	112	30.9
Total	363	100.0

From the Table 2 above, 186 (51.2%) of the respondents were male and 177 (48.8%) were female. This implies therefore, that the questionnaire was majorly filled by males. The percentage of the age bracket that filled the questionnaire showed that of the respondents, 119 persons (32.8%) were 20years and below, while 131 (36.1%) were between 21-30 years, then 58 (16.0%) were 31-40years and 55 (15.2%) were 41 and above. This is to say that persons between 21-30 years filled most of the questionnaires. The table reveals that 251 (69.1%) of the respondents were single, while 112 (30.9%) of the respondents were married. Therefore, the questionnaires were filled majorly by unmarried respondents.

Table 3 below shows the relationship between the celebrity image and brand loyalty. It reveals how much of the variance in the dependent variable (brand loyalty) is explained by the independent variable (celebrity image), the directions of linear relationships that exist among the variables, and the fitness of the regression model towards measuring the relationships among the variables. From the above Table the model is statistically significant (F = 54.381, sig = 0.001).

The nature of the linear relationship between the celebrity image and customers' loyalty towards the brand suggests a significant and positive linear relationship (β =0.323, sig.= 0.000). More so, the relationship between the variables reflects that the independent variable explains 13% (R^2 = 0.131) variance in brand loyalty.

Table 3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CELEBRITY IMAGE AND BRAND LOYALTY					
Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1 (Constant)	2.777	0.148		18.719	0.000
Brand loyalty	0.323	0.044	0.362	7.374	0.000
R			0.362		
R^2			0.131		
Adj. R^2			0.129		
F-values			54.381 (Sig. = 0.000)		

Source: The Authors

Table 4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUSTWORTHINESS AND BRAND ASSOCIATION					
Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1 (Constant)	2.539	0.129		19.739	0.000
trustworthiness	0.368	0.038	0.456	9.738	0.000
R			0.456		
R^2			0.208		
Adj. R^2			0.206		
F-values			94.826 (Sig. = 0.000)		

Source: The Authors

Table 4 reveals just how much of variance in the dependent variable (celebrity trustworthiness) is explained by the independent variable (brand association), the directions of linear relationships that exist among the variables, and the fitness of the regression model towards measuring the relationships among the variables. From the above Table, the model is statistically significant (F=94.826, sig=0.000). More so, the nature of the linear connection between trustworthiness and brand association suggests a significant and positive linear relationship (β =0.368, sig.=0.000). The relationship between trustworthiness and brand association reflects that the independent variable explains 20.8% (R^2 =0.208) variance in brand association.

Table 5 ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CELEBRITY EXPERTISE AND PERCEIVED QUALITY			
		Expertise	**Perceive**
expertise	Pearson Correlation	1	0.208[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	363	363
perceive	Pearson Correlation	0.208[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	363	363

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: The Authors

Coefficient of Determination

The formula for obtaining the coefficient is:

$$C.O.D = r^2 * 100$$

Such that r = Pearson correlation

$$C.O.D = (0.208)^2 x100\%$$
$$C.O.D = (0.208)^2 \ x100\%$$
$$C.O.D = 0.043264 \ x \ 100\%$$

Therefore, C.O.D =4.3264%

From the Table 5 above celebrity expertise and perceived quality exhibits a correlation coefficient of 0.208 values showing a relationship with significantly less than 0.01 (R=0.208, P< 0.001, n=363). The Pearson correlation of r=0.208 therefore specifies 4.3264% shared variance between celebrity expertise and perceived quality. In other words, celebrity expertise accounts for 4.3264% of the variability in perceived quality.

DISCUSSION

This paper investigated the impact of Celebrity Endorsement on Consumer Brand Preference in the Nigerian telecommunication industry. The outcome from the study, based on regression and correlation analysis showed a positive relationship between dimensionalities of celebrity endorsement and consumer brand preference. Globally, the use of celebrity endorsement as a way of strategic advertising communication is gaining increasing attention. Consequently, companies are adopting celebrity endorsement as an active inducer of consumer interest towards their brands. The telecommunication industry has not been an exception in the use of celebrity as a strategic advertising initiative. Consequently, the outcome of this study aligns with existing studies, for example Arai et al. (2014), Chaudhary & Asthana (2015), who have established that celebrity endorsement induces public awareness and creates a lot of promotion towards the firm's brand.

The first hypothesis of this study examined the influence of celebrity image on brand loyalty. The finding from the study revealed that customers of firm products are conscious about the role that celebrity image has on their willingness to either establish their emotional trust towards a brand or not to do so. This effect can be tied to a psychological effect that customers and consumers have towards a celebrity, especially when they choose to identify with a brand. Invariably, a positive celebrity image will induce higher brand loyalty, and otherwise. The finding from this study is unique from that of ul Hassan & Jamil (2014) that reported an insignificant connection amongst celebrity endorsement and purchase intention between Indian and Pakistanis. However, Dix et al. (2010) affirmed that celebrity endorsement is very significantly related to young adults' switching behaviour and brand loyalty. Consequently, celebrities serve as social agents that induce consumers' loyalty towards a brand.

Also, this study found a significant relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and brand association. This result proposes that consumers' willingness to associate with a brand depends to some extent on their trust of the celebrity endorser. Within the strategic advertising

literature, evidences abound to support this position. Wang & Scheinbaum (2018) opined that celebrity trustworthiness induces a lift in brand defiance and purchase intention of consumers. Ibidunni et al. (2018b) also established the relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and consumer brand preference in a developing economy.

Finally, the relational effects amid celebrity expertise and perceived quality was established using correlation analysis. This result is concurrent with our assumption and are in line with existing studies, such as Gauns et al. (2018) and Cuomo et al. (2019) that have confirmed that celebrity expertise is a significant factor for influencing consumers' perception towards brand quality.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDIES

This study investigated that celebrity endorsement as a strategic advertising communication tool for instigating higher levels of brand preference. It established hypotheses to determine the perceived influences on celebrity image, trustworthiness and expertise on diverse dimensions of consumers of telecommunication products. Bearing in mind the need to bridge a gap in the existing literature about firms' ability to translate the usage of celebrity endorsement into high consumer patronage and loyalty, this study is of importance. The findings from the study established the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumer brand preference. Consequently, this study has immersed the implication for theory and practice in the strategic advertising communication field.

The insights gathered from this theory, justify the role of strategic advertising communication, especially celebrity endorsement, as a prominent area of study in developing economies. It demonstrates the openness of consumers to identify with brands that their favourite and most trustworthy celebrities are associated with. However, noting that the Nigeria telecommunication industry is fast growing with the need to reach an uncovered wider scope of population, it is expected that further studies investigate cultural dynamics that could facilitate the use of celebrity endorsement for effective communication of brands and create desirable competitive positions for firms in the industry. Following the findings of this study it is recommended that organizations should investigate which celebrity should be used to endorse the brand, especially with respect to the celebrity's(ies') trustworthiness, expertise and image, to ascertain the fitness of such celebrity with the firm's product and target audience. Organization should also give attention to influential messages carrying product's distinguishing features in the process of matching celebrity choice with customer preference. This is important as the appealing communication through celebrity endorsement are helpful for brand loyalty.

This study has served as an eye-opener to managers of firms to the usefulness of celebrity endorsement as an advertising tool for improving consumer brand preference. Managers are, therefore, expected to base celebrity selection based on their firms' consumer niche and product categories. Meanwhile, there must be a match between the extents of perceived trustworthiness and expertise that celebrities have sustained and the brands which they represent. Finally, while this study has made concerted efforts on the investigation of celebrity endorsement as a strategic advertising means among a large amount of youth and young adult population, it is suggested that further studies recruit a sample from broader demographic groups to understand social motivators and influences that promote attitude change in consumers.

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