

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS AND PRODUCT PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN CONSUMER MARKETS

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Abstract:

The Nigerian economy has experienced increased launching of consumer products; this is occasioned by the level of competition in the country. As such consumers are exposed to large number of product-related communication messages in primetime television and newspaper content. One commonly strategy adopted by manufacturers of consumer products is the use of celebrity endorsement with its attendance cost and other risks. The main objective of this study is to establish if there is a relationship between brand positioning, purchasing decisions, brand equity and celebrity endorsement. A survey of 142 respondents was used and the data was analyzed with Structural Equation Model. The results indicate that trust, level of expertise and the fit between the celebrity and the product have positive impact on product performance. However, it was discovered that attractiveness of the celebrity and the similarities between the celebrity and the receiver has little effect on product performance. Therefore, organizations desirous of making use of celebrity in promoting their products should evaluate the attributes of the celebrities that will enhance product performance.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, brand image, product performance

Introduction

Consumer products market appears saturated and it is increasingly becoming difficult to penetrate the market to secure and sustain customers' attention. The difficulty arose from the increasing number of new and competing products in the market with primetime television cluster becoming almost a quarter of promotional content. In addition, newspapers contents are somewhat saturated with close to 50 percent advertising. The espoused scenario is of advantage to media houses in terms of revenue, however, the implication for the corporate sector is that consumers are exposed to floods of product-related communication messages. The problem that becomes easily discernable from the consumers perspective is the difficulty within the limit of his cognitive capacity to comprehend and absorb the flood marketing communication messages. The

scenario has led not only intense competition for consumer attention but the search for and emergency of innovative strategies to break through to the consumers. One seemingly appealing strategy in the corporate sector is the use of celebrity endorsement in advertisements.

Celebrities are individuals who enjoy public recognition by a large share of a certain group of people. Friedman & Friedman (1979) defined the term "celebrity" as an individual who is known to the public, for example, actors, sports figure, and entertainers, among others. Dean and Biswas (2001) suggested that celebrity endorsements can contribute to higher consumer awareness, advertisement ratings and favorable product evaluations. It is argued that successful celebrity endorsements could have a substantial impact on firms' financial returns (Erdogan, Baker and

Tagg, 2001). Celebrity endorsement becomes effective when consumers can find a clue of the endorsers' genuine likeness of the product rather than possible earning from the endorsement. Research has shown celebrity endorsement has multiple effects on the product and message performance: credibility, message recall, memory and likeability of the advert and purchasing intentions (Erdogan, 1999; Ericsson and Hakansson, 2005).

However, celebrity endorsement is not a trivial assignment both in terms of financial and image consequences of bad endorsement. Consequently, firms expend substantial attention and financial resources to attract and retain the right celebrity for their products. Poor judgment in the choice of celebrity endorser could harm not only sales and corporate image but may hasten commercial failure of products in markets where morality and ethical standards are of high essence. Therefore, this study explores celebrity endorsement and its effectiveness in enhancing brand purchase intention among consumers in a developing economy like Nigeria.

There have been several studies on celebrity endorsement, however, majority of these studies were conducted in advanced economies. Therefore, as far as can be determined very few of such research are conducted in developing countries of Africa particularly in Nigeria. This gap in literature is somewhat alarming given the emerging changes in consumers' behavioural pattern that seem to be a snowball of the pattern in the developed economy. In Nigerian, for example, consumers have become more sophisticated with product demand that define consumers 'self-concept'. This study, in part, is an effort to bridge this gap and explore the relevance of celebrity endorsement to Nigerian companies. Not much research work has been done in Nigeria despite the fact of it being perceived as a potential market for celebrity endorsed products. This study promises a new perspective of Nigerian consumers about celebrity endorsement.

This is important in order to ascertain whether celebrity endorsement has positive value transfer as it is suggested elsewhere. Product related communication often form targets young consumers, therefore, the perception of young consumers on celebrity endorsement is important to gauge the relevance of the concept in understanding consumers purchasing intention.

An important marketing function is to position and effectively communicate the benefits and equity of a brand to the consumers effectively and to penetrate the mind of the consumers enough as to gain their attentions. The thrust of the marketing efforts is not only to create awareness, but to also catch the attention of the customers, develop appropriate positive associations between the product and the value transfer of the celebrity, influence recall and eventually to induce trial and effect purchase decisions (Jain, 2011). Advertising as a marketing communication tool attempts to coordinate consumer behavior and purchases. In high competitive consumer market like Nigerian market achieving this objective is an uphill task. As such, consumer product companies develop all kinds of measures to motivate and influence positive consumer behavior. One of such measures according to Ohanian (1991) is the use of superstars in advertising to generate publicity and attention

Literature Review

A Celebrity is person who enjoys public recognition by a large share of a certain group of people. Friedman & Friedman (1979) defined the term "celebrity" as an individual who is known to the public (actor, sports figure, entertainer, etc.). That is the achievements of the celebrity are in areas other than that of the product class endorsed (Johansson & Sparredal, 2002). Celebrities appear in public for several reasons. They appear in public when fulfilling the demands of their profession; attending special celebrity events like movie awards; they are part of news item;

fashion magazines and tabloids, provide second source of information on events of their private life; and acting as spokes people in advertising to promote products and services.(Kambitsis et al, 2002, Tom et.al. , 1992). When celebrities act as spokes-people in advertising to lend credence to product awareness and possible sales this is referred to celebrity endorsement. According to Ericsson & Hakansson (2005) celebrity endorser is “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement”. There are various categories of celebrities. They can be categorized based work/performance area: entertainers (pop-stars, musicians, showmen, actors, models, etc.); sports figures, businesspersons or politicians. They could also be classified according to the level of their familiarity (local, national or international / global), and their demographics (Banytė, Stonkienė, Piligrimienė, 2011). Certain basic attributes attract marketers to the celebrities; these are beauty, talent, athleticism, power, etc) which reflect the desired attractions of the brands they endorse.

Ericsson & Hakansson (2005) argued that repeated association of a brand with a celebrity might ultimately lead consumers to think the brand possesses the attractive qualities that are similar to the celebrity's. A purchasing decision in favour of the brand may also be made because consumers have preference for or likeness for the celebrity who endorses it.

Several reasons had been adduced in extant literature for the use of celebrities in advertising. Belch & Belch (2001) indicate stopping power of the celebrities as a good reason. They argued further that celebrity endorsement enhances advertising messages, message recall and brand recognition as well as helping to create positive attitudes toward the brand and creating a personality for the endorsed brand. Additional argument put forward is that

celebrities could influence consumers' feelings, attitudes and purchase behavior favorably.

There are three main theories of celebrity endorsement in literature: (a) The Meaning transfer theory (McCracken, 1989). This theory is based on the assumption that celebrity endorsers have cultural and symbolic meanings which could be transferred to the product so endorsed. To adopt this theory the company must identify product features that the celebrity also possesses or features of the celebrity that the company wants associated with the product, which the consumers can relate with (Erdogan, 1999; Johansson & Sparredal, 2002). (b) The Elaboration likelihood theory (ELM) (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). The theory is based on the persuasive element of marketing communication (advertising) to influence behavior and attitude. The theory believes that attitude formation is a function of the amount and nature of relevant and appropriate information that is available as a result of persuasive message received. Therefore, the celebrity endorsement can only be effective if the receiver's involvement is low as the celebrity effect on attitude is more significant (Johansson & Sparredal, 2002). (c) Three-order hierarchy theory: is based on learning, dissonance/attribution and low-involvement models (Floyd, 1999) relating to product differentials and product involvement. It is a useful theory when the consumers are

Celebrity endorsement is effective only if there are positive links between the brand and the celebrity. However, irrespective of the positive links the association is riddled with risks (Till, 1998). The risk may eventually have negative impact on the brand. These risks had been classified in extant literature to three: (a) celebrity-related risks involving celebrity negative publicity arising from their private lives or professional activities (White, Goddard, Wilbur, 2009). There are various forms of celebrity-related risks, for example where an athlete is injured or involved in drug related issues (extinction risk) or personal life scandal

(moral danger risk) (Johansson & Sparredal, 2002). (b) Product-related risks: this will occur when attention shift from the brand to the celebrity. This is referred to as the risk of overshadowing. It can also be risks of overexposure and confusion that is celebrity endorses diverse products and many celebrities endorsing a brand respectively (Ericsson & Hakansson, 2005; Johansson & Sparredal, 2002). (c) Financial risk is associated with high cost of using celebrities to endorse a brand. The question to be asked is the investment a worthwhile one (Tandon & Mehrotra (2005).

There are a number of variables used in extant literature to evaluate the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement and its impact on brand. These include trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect and similarity (TEARS).

Celebrity Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be captured within the context of celebrity endorsement as honesty, integrity, and believability of the celebrity by the consumers. This elicits confidence in and acceptance of the celebrity and the inherent messages of the endorser by the consumers. This in the long run helps to influence consumer's beliefs, opinions, attitudes and purchasing behavior (Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg, 2001; Ohanian, 1991)). Trustworthiness in encompassed in credibility source model which belief that level of acceptability of a message depends on the the level of credibility of the source of the message. From the above it is proposed as follows:

H1: The greater the trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser, the greater his/her effectiveness on brand positioning.

Celebrity Expertise

Expertise has been captured in literature as authoritativeness, competence and qualification (Magnini, Honeycutt and Cross, 2008; McCroskey, 1966; Whitehead, 1968). The celebrity level of persuasiveness is enhanced by the expertise he is believed to possess. This will give the consumers' confidence

of valid assertions of the messages. The argument is extended by Aaker and Meyers (1987) who advocated that consumers are more persuaded to buy advertised brands that are endorsed by knowledgeable celebrity or by celebrity whose profession is closely linked to the brand functions. However, Ohanian (1991) posted that the expertise of the endorser does not real matter in persuading and influencing the consumers. There may be need for expert opinion or opinion of persons perceived to be knowledgeable about a product partly because of the nature of the product or the need to provide 'concrete basis of knowledge' about the brand. The crux of expert opinion is to influence positive attitude toward the endorsed brand. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H2: The greater the expertise of a celebrity endorser, the greater his/her effectiveness in influencing purchasing decisions.

Celebrity Attractiveness

Langmeyer and Shank (1994), define celebrity attractiveness as all embracing. It covers not only the physical or facial beauty, but other embodiments of beauty such as sportsmanship, charm, grace, and intelligence. There are evidences in extant literature to link source attractiveness and brand image (Kamins, 1990). Research has shown the relationships between physical attractions and evaluations, opinion, brand promises recall and likeability of a brand (Joseph, 1982; Kahle and Homer (1985). Other researchers like Till and Busler (1998) concluded that attractive celebrity has positive effect on consumer attitudes towards a brand. The potency in attractiveness source is its ability to convey meaning effectively than less attractive sources. Consequently, brand image is positively affected by the attractiveness of the celebrity. Therefore, it is proposed as follows:

H3.Celebrity attractiveness has an indirect and positive effect on brand equity

Celebrity Similarity

Similarity is an important concept in marketing communication. It rests on the assumption that consumers find it easy to believe and rely on messages from sources that share similar characteristics with them. When the source and the receiver share similar needs, objectives, interest and lifestyle, the source is better appreciated and his position easily understood (Kelman, 1961). The bond of similarity between endorser and the consumer increases the source level of persuasion. This explains why marketers use regular-looking people that consumers can relate with (Belch and Belch, 2001). Therefore, the following is proposed:

H4: The higher the level of similarity between the celebrity and the receiver, the higher the positive impact of the celebrity on brand image

Celebrity Match-up

One important reason for celebrity endorsement is to match the image and

values of the celebrities with those of the customers and the brand. Marketing communication using a celebrity whose image and values are similar to the brand results in higher level of believable messages. Meaning transfer is enhanced if there are close match between the celebrity and the brand (Kamins and Gupta, 1994). The messages to be delivered within marketing communication process by the endorser should be related to his image and the product image

H5: The congruence or fit between the celebrity and the product will have a significant positive impact on the brand image.

The relationship of the various variables and their effect is illustrated in model depicted in figure 1. The model shows the effects and relationships of the variables on how the consumers can emulate the celebrities and how such influences affect purchasing of the product.

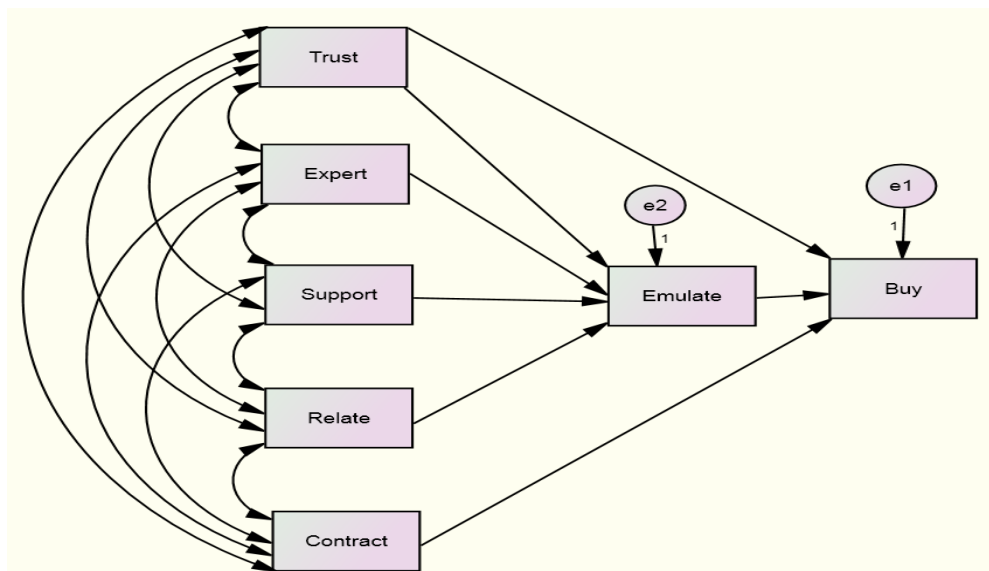


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Celebrities endorsement and consumers' intention to purchase

Materials and Methods

Respondents for this research are undergraduate students in a public

university located in the southwest part of Nigeria. The research is restricted consumers of Chi Food limited (a consumer product company, specializing

in processed foods and drinks) and 7up Bottling Company (producers of Pepsi in Nigeria). The choice of the companies and the industries stemmed from the observed preference of the companies in the use of celebrity endorsements for their product advertisements. Processed foods and soft drink industries are large industries with several big companies and leading consumer products. For example, Chivita is a locally processed packed drink with substantial size of the market. It is a leading processed packed drink with only one leading competitor. Pepsi on the other hand is also a market leader. It is not only an international brand but a leading national product with only one other national competitor. As shown in the Table 1, the choice of celebrity by the companies varies greatly from actors, footballers to musicians.

The study made use of survey research design. Survey research design was chosen because conceptually as a descriptive research design is meant to aid collecting of large and small samples from a given population (Osuwagwu, 2003). The choice of survey method was because it suitable to address the research hypothesis in this study. The study approach is inline with similar studies (Magnini, Honeycutt Cross, 2008) and survey approach recommended by Conart, Mokwa and Varadarajan (1990) involving multi-item measure, self typing and research assessment.

The sample frame for this research was drawn from a population of consumers of the sampled products among final year students of Business Administration and Marketing of a public University, Lagos southwestern part of Nigeria. Lagos is Nigeria's largest and biggest commercial center with headquarters of all commercial institutions and Nigeria's former capital. The programmes chosen for this study has a combined population of two hundred and sixteen students (business administration = 140 and marketing 76). The total population was used for this study because the closer the sample size to the population is the closer the population

parameter is. The survey instrument is self-administered with 16 items measured on 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1). The research instrument benefited greatly from similar instrument in literature particularly the study of Magnini, Honeycutt and Cross (2008). The instrument was modified consistent with the requirements of the study and location peculiarities for example age of the respondents, products and the celebrities were included in the instrument.

Of the sampled respondents 158 copies were retrieved, 16 copies were rejected as they were not properly filled, while 142 copies were adjudged good and properly filled which form the basis of this study, this translated to about 65% response rate. Respondents included in the sample have bought the product so endorsed by the celebrity and must have seen the adverts. SPSS software package analysis was used for the analysis of the data set. The internal consistency of the data was tested with Cronbach Alpha. Cronbach Alpha is the most acceptable measures to test reliability of a multi-item scale. The item by item reliability test ranges between 0.747-0.883 which falls within acceptable standard (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1992). This suggests the adequacy of the measurement. To test for construct validity factor analysis was used in line with suggestion of Hair, et. al (1992). The suitability of factor analysis for the data was tested using Barlett's Test of Sphericity ($p=0.000$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was discovered to be within acceptable limits 0.643 (Hart, Webb and Jones, 1994)

The size of the sample (216) makes factor analysis suitable. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient as suggested by McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999) served as additional evidence of convergence validity. Reliability is a necessary condition for validity as unreliable measure lessens correlation between research measures (Hair, et. al 1992).

Results and Discussion

Structural equation model is used to test the data collected and test hypothesis. Generally, the measurement model fit the data well, and constructs possessed adequate measurement properties of structural equation model. The overall fit of the causal model was tested using the structural-equation approach (Figure 2). The intention is to determine individually and collectively the effects of celebrity trust, expertise, support, relatedness and multiple contracts on whether the consumers will emulate the celebrities or purchase the product so endorsed by the celebrity. The purchase intention of the consumers is linked to whether he is willing to emulate the celebrity or not. The model fit the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2 (142) = 2.816$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.589$; NFI = 0.944, CFI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000).

On the trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser and its effects on consumers purchase intention of the products endorsed the path coefficient are 0.23 and 0.14 for trustworthiness on consumers' intention to emulate the celebrity. The study presumed that consumers will translate their celebrity trust, his/her judgment on the expertise of the celebrity, celebrity support and ability to relate and associate with celebrity to emulate and consequently followed the

celebrity path to purchase the product endorsed. These assumptions have a combined effect or path coefficient of 0.22 on purchase intention. This is marginally lower than trust-intention to buy relationship, however, in a saturated market this could have more than marginal implications. While the R^2 value for trustworthiness is 6.54%. This confirmed H_1 . That is the findings indicate that if the consumer can trust the celebrity he will be influenced to emulate and buy the product.

Hypothesis two indicates that the expertise of the celebrity and trustworthiness have similar effect on the tendency to emulate celebrity. This suggests that the concern on the characters and integrity of endorsers and corporations strive to dissuade multiple endorsements in not misplaced. These variables are connected to influencing consumers purchasing decision. The path coefficient from figure 2 shows that expertise having direct influence of 0.14 while the R^2 and adjusted R^2 are 6.98% and 5.08% respectively. Since the values are positive and significant it can be concluded that the perceived level of expertise of the celebrities' of the product has positive effect on the consumer buying intention through consumers' emulation of celebrity.

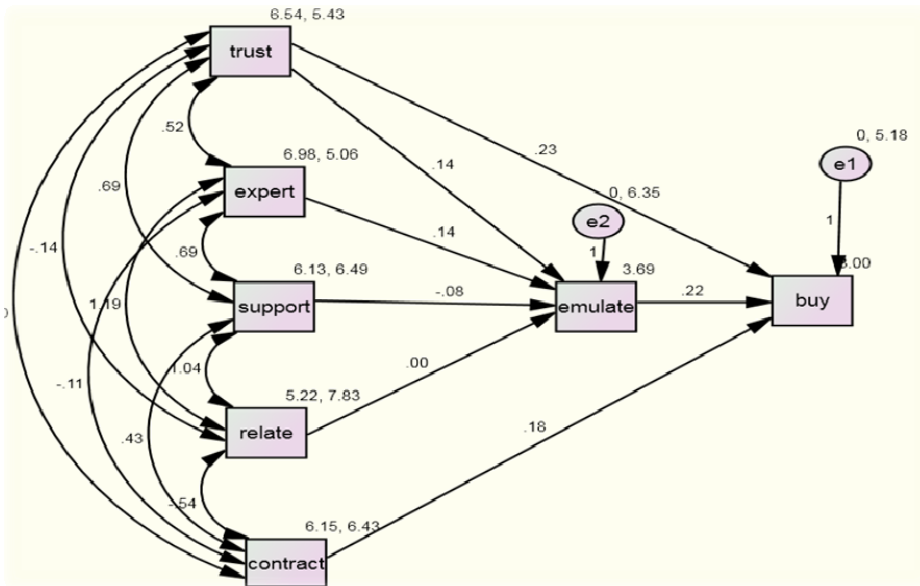


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

Celebrity attractiveness and its positive effects on consumer purchase intention is the subject of hypothesis three. Attractiveness is indicated as support in Figure 2. A review of Figure 2 shows path coefficient of -0.08, R^2 and adjusted R^2 as 6.13% and 6.49% respectively. This shows a negative relationship between attractiveness of the celebrity and consumer emulation of the celebrity. As such, this hypothesis is rejected. Consumers' focus it does appear is more on endorsers' gifts and skills than physical attraction. Physical attraction may enhance celebrity endorsement value in terms of influencing product sales if endorsers communicate trust and skillful knowledge of issues related to products. Endorsers' trust and expertise have significant indirect effect on consumers purchase intention through emulation of celebrities

Hypotheses four and five talk about the influence of similarities between the celebrity and consumer buying intention as well as the congruence of fit between the celebrity and the product. Similarity is shown as support in Figure 2. The path coefficient of the similarity between celebrity and possibility of emulation by

the consumer is 0.00 which indicate no relationship. As such the hypothesis is rejected. A plausible explanation is the human tendency not to relate with others to such a level that the individuals identity is lost and important decisions are externally determined, more so, by a distant celebrity. Celebrities, it seem, are valued for what they are. For the fifth hypothesis about the congruence of fit in indicated in figure 2 as contract the path coefficient is 0.18 and the R^2 and adjusted R^2 are 8.16% and 6.43% respectively. This hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion and Implications

The findings in this study generally confirmed the relationships that exist between celebrity endorsement and consumer intention to buy which have implications for brand management and positioning. It indicates the relevance of strengthening certain aspect of celebrity-consumer relationship as a theoretical foundation of understanding the implications of product endorsement by the celebrity. The search for alternative and effective ways of communication with the consumers in the product saturated business environment and the use of

celebrity should be goal-oriented in form that corporation secures profitable operation. Celebrity endorsement costs much resource investment and the consequences of bad endorsement extend beyond financial to corporate image. Indeed, the effect of bad endorsement may not wear off in within a year: effects must be put in perspective. The motivation for the use of celebrity stem from the possibility of its positively affecting corporate fortunes through creating and building consumer purchase intention. The consumer must indeed trust the celebrity to be influenced by celebrity to buy, that is, endorser must communicate trust to consumers group for corporation to profit from the endorsement in terms of sales increase. This is particularly important in a country like Nigeria where celebrities command substantial followings. It is important for the organizations to understand how their target consumers relate to the celebrity endorser. In most cases the motivation of the consumer may not be determined by the entertainment content of the advert but by the perceived level of expertise displayed or the level of expertise the celebrity is expected to possess about the product. This is easy to determine if the functions of the products or parts of its attributes can be related to the professions of the celebrity. In this case there may be superficial processing of the brand by the influenced consumers, perhaps without detail consideration of the brand and its attribute. To fulfill these conditions therefore, companies must be careful in selection of the celebrity. The celebrity must not only be trusted by consumers they must also be seen to possess some level of expertise or some of the attributes of the brand is related to the professional callings of the celebrity.

There is a caveat in celebrity endorsement; the choice of a celebrity on the strength of attractions may not translate to product purchase. Endorsers who are in difficulty in identifying with the product endorsed may lead to loss rather than profit for companies. Attractiveness could be interpreted to include charms,

sportsmanship, grace and intelligence; however, as can be inferred from the study these qualities may actually not forceful on their own merit to persuade consumers. This shows that consumers may use multiple of attributes to evaluate the impact of celebrity endorsement. Corporations, therefore, must be cognizance of the fact that attractiveness must be complemented with other attributes to make meaningful endorsement and sales related impact. The conclusion therefore, is that companies must be able to gauge the capacity of the celebrity to project multi-attributes which are consistent and of interest to the consumer groups' requirements on all attributes. This is an important requirement that companies must evaluate the overall fit of the celebrity with the brand. However, celebrity-product-consumer group consistency maybe "diluted" when the celebrity endorses several brands at the concurrently. The reactions of the consumers depend on the whether they are concerned about the entertainment content or are intensely attached to the celebrity. Companies must weigh and make a choice of celebrity that possesses attributes that consumers can relate with. Or that some of the attributes of the brand can the linked with the attributes of the celebrity. Either way it may be easy for the consumers to find a similarity between the celebrity and themselves or assumes that the celebrity overall personality fit the brand and influence his buying behavior.

There are a number of managerial implications of this study: one is the fact there are some forms relationships between celebrity and consumers of a product. This attachment may be as a result of the celebrity public image or the fact that the consumers can find some resemblance between his own attributes and the celebrity. This relationship can be used as value transfer medium and can be exploited by the marketers to enhance product standing with the consumers, particularly, in intense consumer market competition like Nigeria. Two the choice of the right celebrity could have serious

marketing implications for the marketers. Attractiveness is one the easiest attributes of the celebrity that can be used in selecting the celebrity. Choice of celebrity must rest on those the consumers' respect and trust not just attractiveness. Marketers must develop a number of criteria to guide the selection of celebrity for their products. There are celebrities with depth of attraction while others have width of attraction depend on the profession. These may be parts of the criteria in selection its real impact must be investigated further.

This study is limited to celebrity endorsement and its impact on consumer buying behavior. Future studies should exploit the implications of multiple endorsements by the celebrity on the brand so endorsed. Future studies must also explore the width and depth impact of celebrity on the products they endorsed. More importantly, is the need to extend studies on celebrity endorsement to industrial products and determine the endorsement capacity in a developing economy like Nigeria.

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