

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT OF BRANDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF ITS INFLUENCE ON THE PURCHASING DECISIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SOUTH- SOUTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how the intention to make purchases by university students in South- South Nigeria are influenced by celebrity endorsement on social media. The objective of the study was to assess the influence of celebrity brand endorsements on social media on the purchasing decisions of University students in south-south, Nigeria. The study employed survey research design to gather data from a study population of 396,327. Meyer sample size determination formula was used to draw a sample size of 383. Source Credibility Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood model served as the theoretical framework. Finding showed that the students were exposed to celebrity endorsements; it was found that the impact of these endorsements on their intentions to buy depended on a variety of factors, including the consumer's trust in the celebrity, the type of product or brand being endorsed, and the celebrity's credibility. Results revealed that the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsements in advertisements and their impact on purchase intention are contingent upon university students' motivation, their capacity for information processing during the decision-making process, and their perception of the celebrity's trustworthiness. It therefore recommended that celebrity endorsers be carefully chosen by marketers to ensure that they have the same values as the brand and appeal to the target demographic.

KEYWORDS: Celebrity Endorsement, Social Media, Purchasing Decision, Students

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, the dynamic landscape of marketing has witnessed a significant shift, especially with the advent of social media platforms. One notable phenomenon that has gained prominence in this digital age is celebrity endorsement of brands on social media. With the rise of influencers and celebrities leveraging their online presence, understanding the influence of such endorsements on consumer behavior, particularly among university students in Nigeria, becomes crucial. The proliferation of social media platforms in Nigeria, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, has created an interconnected virtual space where individuals, including celebrities, share experiences, opinions, and preferences. According to Akinyele and Akinola (2019), social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of Nigerian youth, serving as a platform for social interaction and information consumption.

Although celebrity endorsements have long been a part of traditional marketing, the development of social media has increased the influence of these endorsements. Celebrity endorsement has fast become a marketing communication strategy with huge financial benefits. Silvera and Austad (2014) pointed out that celebrities are people who are well-known to a broad audience and have distinguishing characteristics like good looks and reliability.

In Nigeria, university students make up a substantial portion of the consumer population. They are known for their combination of digital literacy and peer influence sensitivity. According to Oyewole and Badejo (2020), students frequently use social media to connect with others, find enjoyment, and get information. In this environment, the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumers' purchase decisions becomes very fascinating. Social Identity Theory provides a framework for understanding the psychological effects of celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour. As social referents, celebrities play a role in the development of consumer identities. University students may connect themselves with the items that their favourite celebrities advocate in their quest for social belonging, influencing their purchase selections accordingly. It is in the light of this that this study was carried out to assess the influence of celebrity endorsers on social media on the purchasing decisions of university students in South- South, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Celebrity endorsements are meant to help a company stand out from the competition, enhance brand memory, and enable instant recognition (Nwaoboli, 2022). A product or brand can increase its memory value, stand out from the competition in the market, gain the target audience's confidence and trust, and establish mass appeal to attract the public's attention by using celebrity endorsement. Celebrities can effectively draw attention to themselves

and their brands as long as they are advocating ideas that align with their values and are a suitable fit. More so, they must also be seen to be attractive and popular (Inwulu & Milford, 2015; Kofi, 2019).

While celebrity endorsements wield substantial influence, it is essential to acknowledge the potential challenges and ethical considerations. The credibility of endorsements, authenticity of influencers, and disclosure of partnerships are aspects that demand scrutiny in the context of social media marketing (Freberg, McGuaghey & Freberg., 2011). Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the correlation between celebrity endorsements on social media and the purchasing decisions of university students in south-south, Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study include:

- i. To assess the extent of exposure of University students in south-south, Nigeria to celebrity endorsements of brands on social media.
- ii. To identify the predominant platforms through which University students in south-south, Nigeria encounter celebrity endorsements of brands on social media.
- iii. To investigate additional factors that contribute to the purchasing decisions of university students in south-south, Nigeria.
- iv. To evaluate the influence of brand endorsements on social media on the purchasing decision of university students in south-south, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary research underscores the influential role of celebrities in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. According to a study by Kim and Kim (2019), celebrities on social media platforms possess significant power to sway consumer opinions and preferences. Their widespread popularity and engaging content contribute to their effectiveness as endorsers for brands targeting undergraduate students. Mittal's (2020) observed that consumers' purchase decisions and brand loyalty are positively influenced by celebrity endorsements and attributes. Expertise was found to be the most important celebrity trait that influences both brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. It was discovered that physical appeal, likeness, and trustworthiness had little effect on customers' brand loyalty. Apejoye (2013) examined the impact of celebrity endorsement on students' purchase intentions. The study's findings showed that, in comparison to commercials without celebrities, those with celebrities have a considerable influence on students' purchase decisions. Frimpong (2019) observed that the relationship between celebrity endorsement and customers' purchasing intentions in Ghana is not considerably moderated in a developing economy. In a particular emerging country, the study also

looked at how customer views and purchase habits were affected by celebrity endorsements. The study's conclusions provide credence to the ideas that managers should match a celebrity endorser's traits to the product's attributes and that the endorsers' negative press has little to no bearing on the brand's success.

Hammad (2014) conducted research on the impact of celebrity endorsement and advertising on consumer buying behaviour and the image and positioning of the Coca-Cola brand in London, United Kingdom. The researcher provided questionnaires to 104 respondents, a mix of men and women, ages 18 to 50, for them to complete on their own. The researcher also selected online media to get replies from respondents via a website link. The study employed the meaning transfer model, which maintains that different celebrities display a range of meanings, personalities, and attitudes, and the source credibility model, which maintains that all information from a credible source, such as a celebrity, will have an impact on the attitudes and purchasing decisions of the targeted audience. The study concludes that Coca-Cola sales growth is aided by celebrity endorsement and advertising, which affects customer purchasing behaviour.

Kasunthika (2022) explains that the celebrities' endorsement of brands and all of its elements influenced the purchasing intentions of their target audience. Using the source credibility model, Al-Awadhi (2020) discovered that the degree of competence and trustworthiness perceived by the recipients determines the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in brand marketing campaigns.

The source attractiveness model, which maintains that a celebrity's personality, lifestyle, class, age, gender, and other demographic characteristics influence how people see them, was also employed by the researcher. According to the meaning transfer model, people's perceptions of celebrities are influenced by physical attractiveness, likeness, familiarity, and likeability, among other variables. The study's conclusions showed that celebrity likeability significantly and favourably influenced Yemeni customers' purchase intentions in terms of brand image. The study also shows that by drawing attention to a business, celebrity likeability increases the likelihood that a product would be bought.

On their part, Koshy and Manohar (2017) observed that, a brand's customer base may be impacted by celebrity endorsement in both positive and bad ways. Men and women have different attitudes on celebrity endorsements.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Source Credibility Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model served as the foundation for this research. Source Credibility theory is credited to the research work done by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss.

Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss first proposed this hypothesis in 1951, and they refined it in 1953. According to this hypothesis, a communication's persuasiveness is influenced by the source's perceived legitimacy. It has been discovered that the perceived reliability of the communication's sources has a significant impact on the credibility of all forms of communication (Asemah, Nwibo&Akpa, 2017). According to the source credibility idea, when a source promotes itself as credible, people are more likely to be convinced. According to the hypothesis, a communicator's favorable traits can influence how well a message is received by a recipient. Two elements— trustworthiness and expertise—underpin the idea of source credibility, according to this approach.

Hovland and Weiss define trustworthiness as the level of assurance in the communicator's desire to convey the assertion he believes to be most accurate. According to Roozen (2018), expertise refers to how much a communicator is regarded as a reliable source of claim. According to this idea, how audiences react to a message depends largely on how they view the message's source—how and what they understand the source to be. Asemah-Ibrahim, Nwaboli and Asemah (2022) assert that a source should be perceived as more credible when it possesses greater expertise and is less prone to bias. Therefore, when a source promotes itself as credible, people are more likely to be persuaded or swayed. According to Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), there are three categories for source credibility;The factor modelThe functional model;The constructivist model. The authors posit that the factor model plays a role in determining how much the recipient believes the sources to be reliable. According to the functional model, credibility is determined by how well a source meets the specific needs of the recipient, while the constructivist model examines the recipient's actions in relation to the source proposal.

The theory of source credibility holds significant relevance in comprehending the impact of celebrity endorsement on students' buying intentions. The theory contends that a communication's persuasiveness is influenced by the reliability of its source. When a celebrity endorses a product or company, the public's perception of the celebrity's dependability and authenticity acts as a source of credibility and can sway their opinions. When a famous person promotes a good or service, to them, the factor model plays a role in determining how much the recipient believes the sources to be reliable. According to the functional model, credibility is determined by how well a source meets the specific needs of the recipient, while the constructivist model examines the recipient's actions in relation to the source proposal.

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or company, the public's perception of the celebrity's dependability and authenticity acts as a source of credibility and can sway their opinions. When a famous person promotes a good or service, they are effectively acting as a persuasive and informational source for the student audience. How a celebrity is viewed by students as an authority in their industry or a reliable public person can greatly influence how they feel about a company or product. Therefore, the source credibility theory contributes to the understanding of why celebrity endorsements can influence consumers' purchase intentions in a positive way. The celebrity's perceived authority as a persuasive and informational source can strengthen the communication's persuasiveness and raise the possibility that the audience will act.

Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo introduced the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion in 1986 (Nwaoboli, 2022). This persuasive model illustrates how messages can affect people's attitudes and actions. According to the ELM, a message's efficacy may be influenced by the amount of time and energy the intended audience devotes to understanding the material being sent. Here are the key tenets of the ELM:

Dual-Route to Persuasion: The centre route and the peripheral route are the two paths to persuasion that the ELM suggests. The decision between these two approaches is based on how motivated and willing the target audience is to put in the work necessary to understand the message.

Central Route: The central route to persuasion is one that the target audience is considered to be pursuing when they are willing and able to put up the effort necessary to digest the information being delivered. In this instance, the advertisement works best when it offers compelling, well-supported claims and pertinent details in favour of the company or product it is promoting. High-involvement products are the ideal candidates for this kind of advertising since the target market is more driven to make educated decisions about what to buy.

Peripheral Route: The target audience is seen to be choosing the peripheral path to persuasion when they lack the motivation or capacity to put up the effort necessary to digest the information being delivered. In this instance, the commercial works best when it makes use of auxiliary cues to establish a link between the product and favourable results, such as symbols, visuals, feelings, and celebrity endorsements. When it comes to low-commitment products, this advertisement works best because the target market is not driven to give the product a thorough review.

Attitude Change: According to the ELM, attitudes can shift as a result of either peripheral or central processing, but the direction and degree of these

changes in attitude can vary. Compared to attitudes developed by peripheral processing, those created through central processing are typically stronger and more enduring.

Message Processing: According to the ELM, a number of variables, such as the motivation of the target audience, the type of message, and the environment in which it is being presented, can affect how much time and attention is put into analyzing the message.

Persuasion Factors: The ELM outlines a number of variables that might affect a communication's persuasiveness, such as the source's legitimacy, the arguments' quality, the potency of the peripheral cues, and how well the message aligns with the needs and values of the intended audience. The ELM states that a number of elements, including as the motivation and aptitude of the target audience and the nature of the product being advertised, might influence the decision between the core and peripheral routes to persuasion. Advertisers may produce more effective ads that connect with the target audience and help them reach their marketing objectives by being aware of these elements and choosing the right approach.

Celebrity endorsements serve as an illustration of how to appeal to the Elaboration Likelihood Model's periphery. When a celebrity supports a business or product, they typically rely on ancillary cues like physical attributes, way of life, or personality features to establish an emotional connection with the target audience. By doing this, they hope to establish a connection between the product and favourable results, like prosperity, contentment, or attractiveness. The ELM contends that how customers interpret information about celebrity endorsements may influence how successful the endorsement is.

Customers are more likely to engage in central route processing and carefully consider the merits of the endorsement if they have a strong incentive to assess the good or service being praised. Conversely, customers who lack high levels of motivation could be more influenced by extraneous cues, like the celebrity's appeal or popularity, in shaping their opinions and attitudes towards the good or service.

The success of the endorsement may therefore rely on how these students interpret the information, making the ELM relevant to the impact of celebrity endorsement on student purchase decisions. The recommendation is more likely to persuade students who thoroughly and thoughtfully consider the material, but it may have less of an impact on students who depend only on surface-level clues.

METHODOLOGY

The general approach used for the study was survey research design. This decision was made with the necessity to gather a representative sample of the thoughts and opinions of those involved in mind. The whole student body enrolled in federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone make up the study's population. The six states of the South-South zone are AkwaIbom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. There are 187,923 students enrolled in the seven federal institutions in the south-south zone, compared to 174,689 students at state universities and 33,715 students at private universities. This raises the total number of research participants to 396,327.

A sample size of 383 was obtained by applying the Meyer sample size determination formula. A multiple-stage sampling process was employed to choose various research components. As a result, the chosen sample was given the questionnaire. Prior to the final data collection, a pilot study was carried out to guarantee the validity and reliability of the questionnaire used to collect data for this study. A total of 370 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and found appropriate for the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Exposure of South-South University Students to Celebrity Endorsements of Brands on Social Media

Variable	No. of Responses	Percentage
High exposure	150	40%
Moderate exposure	90	24%
Low exposure	60	16%
Very low exposure	30	8%
No exposure	40	12%
Total	370	100%

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of responses indicating the level of exposure. For instance, 40% of the respondents reported high exposure, 24% reported moderate exposure, 16% reported low exposure, 8% reported very low exposure, and 12% reported no exposure.

Table 2: Primary Channels of Exposure to Celebrity Endorsements of Brands on Social Media

Variable	No. of Responses	Percentage
Social media platforms	320	86%

Variable	No. of Responses	Percentage
Sponsored posts	30	8%
Influencer collaborations	20	5%
Total	370	100%

This Table 2 reveals that majority (86%) of respondents reported exposure through social media platforms, while smaller proportions mentioned exposure through sponsored posts (8%) and influencer collaborations (5%). The total number of responses is 370, representing 100% of the surveyed population.

Table 3:Other Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions

Variable	No. of Responses	Percentage
Product quality	120	32%
Price	60	16%
Brand reputation	50	13%
Personal preference and taste	130	35%
Social influence	10	3%
Total	370	100%

In this Table 3, the factors influencing the purchasing decisions of the south-south university students are identified and quantified. It provides the number of responses and the percentage for each factor. The factors include product quality, price, brand reputation, personal preference and taste, and social influence. For example, 35% of respondents attributed their purchasing decisions to personal preference and taste, while only 3% mentioned social influence.

Table 4: Influence of Celebrity Endorsement of Brands on Social Media on Purchasing Decisions

Variable	No. of Responses	Percentage
Strongly influence	50	14%
Moderately influence	120	32%
Slightly influence	110	30%
Does not influence	70	19%
I am not sure	20	5%
Total	370	100%

This Table 4 examines the influence of celebrity endorsements of brands on social media on the purchasing decisions of university students in south-south, Nigeria. It presents the number of responses and the percentage for different levels of influence. Responses range from “strongly influenced” to “not influenced” at all, with a category for uncertainty. For instance, 32% of respondents reported being moderately influenced by celebrity endorsements, while 19% stated that they were not influenced at all. The total number of responses is 370, representing 100% of the surveyed population.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings based on Objective 1 showed that a substantial portion of participants reported being exposed to celebrity endorsements on social media at a high level (40%), with moderate exposure (24%) coming in second. This suggests that celebrity endorsements are widespread on social media platforms and most likely have a substantial fan base among university students.

Based on Objective 2, social media emerged as the most common method of exposure, with 86% of respondents reporting exposure through these platforms. This implies that social media plays a significant influence in influencing the purchasing decisions of the population under study.

Findings based on Objective 3, revealed that the most important variables impacting purchase decisions were determined to be personal preference and taste (35%) and product quality (32%). This suggests that university students prioritize both their own preferences and the quality of the products when making purchasing decisions. On Objective 4, according to 32% of respondents, there is a moderate impact of celebrity endorsements on purchasing decisions, which is consistent with the results.

However, a sizeable portion of respondents (19%) asserted that celebrity endorsements had no bearing whatsoever on their purchase choices. This suggests that while celebrity endorsements may have some influence, they do not have the final say over university students purchases.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, there is significant correlation between students purchase decisions and celebrity endorsements on social media. The findings show that using celebrities to promote items on social media is a well-known and effective marketing strategy among university students in South-South, Nigeria. The majority of students are exposed to celebrity endorsements via social media, and they frequently encounter these kinds of commercials in their daily lives, merely giving them a cursory glance.

However, the success of these ads depends on a number of factors, including the students' motivation and aptitude for information processing as well as the celebrity's credibility. The significance of celebrity endorsement as a marketing approach is highlighted by the fact that university students in South-South Nigeria are generally susceptible to some degree of influence while making purchases. Based on the findings, this study recommends as follows:

1. Celebrity endorsers should be carefully chosen by marketers to ensure that they have the same values as the brand and appeal to the target demographics. This can boost the advertisement's credibility and raise the possibility that viewers will pay attention to it.
2. University students frequently interact with celebrity endorsements through social media sites. Marketers ought to make use of these platforms to produce captivating contents that emphasize the advantages of the goods or services in order to bolster the argument.
3. The celebrity endorsement's content must be genuine and relevant to the intended audience. It should present the goods or services in a way that appeals to the audience as authentic and natural.

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