

Celebrity endorsement and patronage of fast moving consumer goods in Nigeria

*ABIODUN ADENIYI, PH.D. & **ISMAILA ISAH

Abstract

The article examines the concept of celebrity endorsement and how it helps to enhance patronage of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). It evaluates the assumption that using celebrities to endorse a brand could enhance patronage of the brand. The paper looks at how celebrity influence could be determined by media reportage, referrals, social media buzz, and viewings, repeatedly generated by the brand in association with the celebrity within a period. The article argues that celebrity endorsement influences consumer patronage of FMCG brand, aside noting that the influence of celebrities on consumer patronage is however not in isolation as there are ancillary activities such as advertising, media relations, events and sales promotion. They additionally benefit from the star power and influence of the celebrity to promote the brand. Brands in the FMCG space need, therefore, embrace celebrity endorsement, as a tool to enhance patronage by consumers, just as there should be due diligence in the selection and contract agreement with celebrities before they are engaged for brand promotion.

Key Words: Celebrity, Endorsement, Brand, Fast Moving Consumer Goods

Introduction

The desire to have an edge in competitions has compelled brand owners in Nigeria to rethink their marketing strategies and practices by embracing innovative ways to create, enhance a distinctive image in the minds of their target market. Brand standing and differentiation have become some spheres of competition for market share as brands continue to engage in activities to attract and keep customers across segments of the market. In recent years, the concept of brand association as a veritable means to understanding customer preference and building valuable brand appears to be the preoccupation of most brand managers. Aaker (2000) defines Brand Association as anything that the memory can associate with a particular brand. While agreeing with this definition, Brown (2005) opined that brand association also entails notions of quality and characteristics of a product.

The positions above agree that in today's highly complex market environment and the reality of reducing consumers' shopping time and money, product image is everything (James, 2004). Once a brand can create and maintain a unique image,

often through association with distinct attributes like greater quality, credibility, and respectability, then getting customers to choose the brand over the competitors becomes a lot easier (Aaker, 2000). Organizations have focused more on four key elements of brand association to create and maintain a desired image for their brand. These elements are product/service quality, celebrity endorsements, corporate sponsorship of events and social responsibility (Michael, 2007).

All these, in the view of Keller (2005), are done knowing that a brand with positive, unique and favourable image rules the market in both the short and in the long terms. Michael (2007) puts it simply that brand image, whether favourable or unfavourable, has a serious influence on customers' decision to choose or not to choose a particular product. It is in line with the foregoing that managers of Fast Moving Consumer Goods in Nigeria have, and are still investing a huge amount of money on advertising, product differentiation and unique messaging, through brand endorsement, sponsorship of events and of course identification with several important causes in the

*Abiodun Adeniyi, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor and Head, Department of Mass Communication, Baze University, Abuja. He had his first degree from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, after which he worked for *The Guardian* Newspapers, Nigeria, covering various beats in Lagos and Abuja, for more than a decade. He won the British Chevening Scholarship in 2003 to study International Communications at the University of Leeds, England and began his Ph.D. research immediately after his Master's Degree programme at the same University. He was awarded his doctorate degree in Communication Studies in 2008.

**Ismail Isah is a communications teacher and researcher in the Department of Mass Communications at Baze University, Abuja. He is an alumnus of the School of Media and Communications of the Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass communication from Bayero University Kano, a Masters' Degree in Mass communications from the University of Lagos and currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Media Arts at the University of Abuja, Nigeria.

Nigerian Society.

Scope, Framework, and Context of Terms

This analysis is mainly on Fast Moving Consumer Goods in Nigeria such as beverages, noodles biscuits, seasoning items, soap, cream, and other ready-to-eat, ready-to-drink or ready-to-use brands. These products were suitable as they are popular, and available to residents who have reasonable purchasing power, with diversity in education, ethnic and religious affiliations. Coke and Pepsi are similar products. Brand association for this work is anything linked that the memory can keep as associated with a product, including name, colour, country, personality, quality, events and a host of other attributes. Brand is unique and is identified or differentiated from others. It is what customers or consumers used to recognise and experience a product. Consumer Patronage is a decision by individual consumers to be favorably disposed to and buy the goods or service of one company instead of the other. It is about consumers discriminating against organizations that offer substitute goods.

Aaker (2000) notes that just like the associative network model, consumers brand knowledge could be seen as brand node with many interconnecting links, so that when any of these links (for example, corporate social responsibility, service quality, event sponsorship, celebrity endorsement etc) is activated, the associated node (for example, a brand known to be socially responsible) is also activated (Keller, 2005), leading to the choice/patronage of the brand-if social responsibility is a major consideration.

For emphasis, brand association is anything associated with an entity (a brand) (Aaker, 2000), like Milo is associated with sports while we identify Bournvita with family time. Indomie Noodles resonates with children, while Chikkie Noodles prefers to exalt the dexterity of the woman in the kitchen's comfort. This form of brand associations could reflect lifestyle, social status, professional roles and product attributes (Keller, 2005). As Saeed and Arshad (2008) reason, other associations could involve product applications, people who promote it, stores that carry it, and even the country of origin of the product. A brand association Aaker (2000) pursues is "informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory that contains the meaning of the brand for consumers" In this sense, brand association implies the perception of the brand quality, notable events associated with the brand, people (celebrities) use for the promotion of the brand, public image of the brand and consumer

attitudes toward the brand, in the additional evaluation of Davies (2004).

Brand and Branding: Construction and Deconstruction

There appears to be a consensus among scholars and marketing practitioners alike that successful brand is a valuable asset to organizations, especially business firms. In fact, Kotler and Keller (2006) believe that such successful brand as Sony, Nike, Starbucks and a host of others can command a price premium mainly because of the value attached to them. We have offered several other definitions of branding. Williams and McCarthy (2005) define it as the use of name, symbol, or a combination of what defines a product. American Marketing Association (2008) extends this definition by adding that the names, terms, symbol, are not only to identify a particular product/seller but also to differentiate the seller or a group of sellers from the others. A brand is simply a product or service with differentiated dimensions for the same objective (Keller, 2005).

These dimensions, Aaker (2000) observes, could be rational or emotional. Apart from these rational and emotional aspects, a brand has also been observed to be a complex symbol conveying such meanings as attributes of the product/service, benefits to be derived, values, culture (for example, Mercedes represents a German culture of high quality, efficiency and performance); personality and users (Keller, 2005). Studies have shown that successful brand is the most valuable resource that a company can have (Aaker, 2000; Keller, 2005; Chakravarti, 2002; Brown, 2005; Campbell, 2002; and Kotler and Keller 2006). In fact, Keller (2005:59) speculates that the importance of brand will soon be highlighted in entities' reflection of it in their balance sheets. Further, Craig (2007) concludes in his study of factors affecting consumer choice of mobile phones that 8 out of every 10 customers go for brands that stand out, have excellent reputation and are familiar. Familiar brands help customers simplify their purchase decisions, especially regarding expensive and high-risk items, complex situation and decisions requiring long-term commitment (Aaker, 2000, Michael 2007, Vincent and Zhu 2006, Saeed and Reinert 2005, and Keller 2005).

Celebrity Influence

Nigeria is bracing up for a new marketing phenomenon that is more pronounced in the highly sophisticated and discerning markets of the world. On the international scene, such Superstars as Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan, Shaquill O'

Neal, Bill Cosby, Magic Johnson, and in the recent time, Beyoncé, Jay Z, Sean Combs, Will Smith, Rafael Nadal, Lionel Messi and Tiger Woods, are among several other celebrities who have endorsed one brand or the other (Durojaiye, 2009). A recent publication by the Brand Journalists Association of Nigeria (BJAN) showed that celebrity endorsement in Nigeria has increased in years. Among the Nigerian celebrities that have been behind several service brands include Dakore and Helen Paul, who have endorsed 2Sure Hand Sanitizer and Harpic, respectively; Davido and Wizkid who endorsed Pepsi, 2baba who endorsed Coca Cola and Campari, among others.

Research findings on the influence of celebrity on consumer patronage of brands have been controversial. Studies such as Durojaiye (2009), Umar (2007), and Adekunle (2009) seem to conclude that celebrity endorsement creates positive feelings to a brand, draws consumers' attention towards it, stimulates brand name recall and impact positively on brand evaluation and purchase. Nneka (2009) reports that the moment popular celebrities embrace a brand and use its services or products publicly, sales explode. She however opines that the ability of an organization to realize this sales increase through celebrity endorsement depends on the right timing, budget and the right marriage of brand to celebrity.

However, celebrity endorsement has come under attacks from such scholars as Clarks (2005). He believes that the influence of celebrity endorsement among particular demographics, for example, older consumers is virtually zero. In fact, Umair (2005) believes that celebrity can indeed hurt a brand, as it sometimes does, in the personal lives of the celebrities. The recent sexual scandal involving the World Number One Golfer, Tiger Woods, is a good example of celebrity endorsement turning negative. Notwithstanding, scholars such as Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) posit that consumer behavior is so comprehensive and complex to be reduced to being celebrity-determined.

Regardless, brand associations are useful competitive tools for marketers (Aarker, 2002). They are about design, position, differentiate and helpful for differentiating towards uniqueness, and for the benefit of patronizing a product. They seek to influence attitudes and perceptions towards profitability (Campbell, 2002:23). Aderel (2004) believes that brand associations are more useful to consumers than to the marketers. The fundamental importance of a brand is clear in consumers' level of acknowledgment. Thus, knowledge of the product could translate into a relationship leading to loyalty (Ariely, 2005, Nzuki, 2006).

Specifically, associations help to retrieve and process information about a brand, create positive (or negative) attitudes or feelings towards the brand, and generate reasons for making a purchase decision.

Using celebrity power to promote brands in the FMCG market has become a major attraction for brand owners and managers in Nigeria. Celebrities are effective instruments of promoting attraction to the brand. We believe this to provide credible testimony of the brand and can influence customers and their networks of relationship, influencing patronage. Consumers often become attached to brands which enable them to create a desired representation as personified by the celebrity (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Consumers connect with brands as they discover how it fits their self-concepts and brand images (Kemp, 2012). Advertisers are mindful of the equilibrium between a brand and the process of awareness creation.

The quest for market share and consumer patronage between Coca Cola and Pepsi in Nigeria, for instance, appears to have reenacted the 'cola war' as the two brands have engaged several celebrities to push their market share in Nigeria. Celebrities like Wizkid, Davido, Tiwa Savage, JayJay Okocha, Alex Iwobi, DJ Cuppy were engaged by Pepsi while the likes of 2baba, Zlatan Ibile, Reminisce, Small Doctor and Yemi Alade were recruited to lend their star power to the Coke brand in Nigeria. While Pepsi focused on football by building consumer experience around the 2018 world cup in Russia, Coca Cola's attention was more on music using the Coke Studio experience.

The two brands continued in a frenzy that inspired more consumers to engage with the brands either in terms of media attention or patronage. The patronage, media mentions, word-of-mouth and social media buzz and conversation around the two brands clearly illustrated the influence of celebrity endorsements within the period.

Conclusion

Celebrity endorsement is no longer an afterthought or something brands can choose to ignore. It is now part of the marketing and promotional mix for FMCG brands in Nigeria. There is however a need for FMCG brands to invest in research to determine the value that celebrities can add to their brands before engaging them to increase their marketing and sales promotion efforts. Using celebrities to influence brand association should follow due diligence and procedure and in a manner that aligns with strategic development and implementation of marketing and sales promotion

plans. Besides, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by owners and managers of FMCG brands should be strategic in ways that promotes affinity with certain interests and issues such as climate change, social inclusion, youth empowerment, gender mainstreaming, managing diversity among others, which also informs the choice of celebrities with similar interest or aspirations to be attracted by the brands. CSR should include, but not limited to such issues as responsibility to the environment, for instance use of biodegradable plastics for serving water in hotels, biodegradable material for producing recharge cards and others.

Specifically, it is recommended that FMCG brands should constantly rethink and review their position and commitment to social responsibility. They need to evaluate and compare themselves to international best practices on how law-abiding they are (in terms of adherence to professional standards, financial reporting standards and service quality standards), how ethical (specifically, how fair are they treating their workers, suppliers, customers, regulatory agencies and the larger society), and how philanthropic are they (specifically, how many scholarships and bursary they have provided to indigent students, aside from their level of engagement programmes and efforts beneficial to the society. To be effective, there is a need for mechanisms that constantly pop up these questions to keep the companies alert and focused on effectively carrying out social responsibility activities they can execute within their resource constraints. Ultimately, a valuable asset—good will and good public image beckons to service companies that follow the issues espoused above.

Although some benefits accrue from celebrity endorsement in form of image transfer, credibility (especially if the celebrity is credible) of marketing communication, outstanding message (beating advertisement clusters), formation of desirable brand attitude and so on, it may not however influence the bottom line objective - brand choice/patronage. Since celebrity endorsement impact brand awareness and generate brand enthusiasm - both of which desirable attributes required for building a great brand, service companies should be selective in their engagement of celebrity. The celebrity they want to select for endorsement should score high on such criteria as credibility (i.e. he or she must have a high level of talents and skills in their field and must have integrity, honesty and trustworthiness) influence (well loved and respected by large audience), global appeal (recognized and well liked across the border) and self-management ability and ability to sustain superstar power. Adherence to these criteria will prevent the chance

of hiring celebrities whose personality disconnect with the positioning and image the brand hopes to create for itself in the eyes of customers. It also safeguards the image of the brand in case of incidence of misdemeanor in the personal life of the hired celebrity. Ultimately, this will help management of service companies to secure and maintain a desired image (a competitive asset) for their companies or brand.

On event sponsorship, it is important for the Management of FMCG brands to know that the influence of event sponsorships on consumer patronage of their companies is not significant. However, the impact of sponsorship is only limited to creating awareness for companies and their products. In fact, studies have revealed that consumers sometimes do not remember which company sponsors which event. Service companies' investment in the sponsorship of notable event should therefore be carefully reviewed. Specifically, there is a need for FMCG brands to be selective in events they sponsor.

More so, they should ensure they are highly visible during the sponsored events. Similarly, event to be sponsored should score high on such criteria as tangible benefits associated with the event (does the event benefit the society in any meaningful way?), chances for brand exposure to the target audience, ability to sue, if ambushed by competing brand and cost-efficiency of the sponsorship. In addition, there is a need for the sponsoring company to use well designed and colorful banners on-site to expose and establish brand presence, promote the event through company newsletter and website, have brand representatives to address customer concerns and inquiries, leverage the exposure by selling company's product or service and design a feedback mechanism that check on influence of sponsorship on consumer attitude towards the brand.

References

- Aaker, J. (2000), Brand Association and Customer Value Creation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (2): 212-233.
- Aaker, J. (2002), *Building Strong Brand*. 4th Edition. New York: The Free Press.
- Adekunle, E (2009) 'Celebrity Endorsement Goes Wrong': How Companies can Cut Their Losses. www.nigerianbusinessinfo.com
- Allen, E. (2001), The Multi-dimensional Aspect of Service Quality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18 (1): 240-258.
- Armstrong, G. (1994), Consumer Decision Making-Fact or Fiction? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (2): 93-100.

- Armstrong, C. (1988), "Sports Sponsorship: A Case-Study Approach to Measuring its Effectiveness", *European Research*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 97-103.
- Asa, H. (2007) *Corporate Social Responsibility from a Nigerian Perspective*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Handelshohskolan Vid Gotebergs Universitet.
- Baker, M. (2010) *Corporate Social Responsibility*. www.mallenbaker.com
- Brown, W. (2005), *Strategic Brand Management*. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 23 (3): 212-222.
- Campbell, P. (2002), *Brand Familiarity and Advertising Repetition Effects*. *Journal of International Business*, 11 (1): 151-169.
- Carroll, A. (1991) "The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: Toward the Moral Management of Organizational Stakeholders". *Business Horizons*, July-August 1991
- Daniel, J. (2002), *Building a Successful Brand: The Strategic Option*. *Academy of Marketing Science*, 2002 (2): 22-39.
- Davies, D. (2000), *Assessing the Brand through Research*. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*. 2005 (2): 58-67.
- Durojaiye, O. (2009) *Celebrity Endorsement and Scandal: Who Bears the Brunt?* www.nigeriabusinessinfo.com
- Keller, L. K. (2005), *Brand Report Card*. *Harvard Business Review*, January 2005, 234-251.
- McGill, C. (2001), *Brand Building in the 21st Century*. *Journal of Marketing Management*. 17 (3): 27-39.
- Okonkwo, U. (2009) *Luxury Brand and Celebrity: An Enduring Brand Romance*. www.brandchannel.com
- Saeed, M. and Reinert, D. (2005), *Revitalizing Brands*. *Journal of Marketing*, 10 (2): 17-28.
- Stephen, M. R. (2004), *Inserting the Brand for Influence During the Purchase Decision-Making Process*. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 22 (3). Pg 233-247.
- Suzanne, L. (2007) *Why Companies Sponsor Events*. www.suzannelainson.com
- Umair, S. (2009) *Celebrity Endorsement*. Unpublished MBA Thesis. University of Nottingham, UK.
- Vincent, J. (2006), *Effect of Brand Interactive Ability, Familiarity and Image on Customer Choice of Service Providers*. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 30 (3): 445-47.