

Impact of Celebrity Endorsement Switch on Brand Patronage among Selected Telecommunication Subscribers in University of Lagos

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Abstract

Advertising is recording a boost in its use of testimonials in campaigns, as evidenced in the engagement of celebrities, such as, musicians, athletes, footballers and actors/actresses to endorse products and services. Studies abound in which the roles of athletes, musicians, and actors/actresses as endorsers are well documented. However, the switch of a celebrity endorser from one product to another competing brand continues to agitate the minds of researchers. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the impact of celebrity endorsement switch (porting) on brand patronage. In specific terms, the study examined the influence of the switch by 'Saka', a famous comedian on radio and television shows, from endorsing the former 'Etisalat' network (now Nine (9) Mobile) to advertising 'MTN', a rival network. This quantitative study gathered data from 380 respondents from University of Lagos, Nigeria. Findings revealed that, although the Nigerian telecommunication subscribers see celebrities as role models, their use in advertising campaigns as endorsers does not strongly motivate them to purchase the endorsed product. Findings also show that other factors, such as availability and quality of service rendered are among the strong points that ensure subscribers' loyalty to a particular brand. Based on the results, it is recommended that MTN Nigeria should engage in more 'pro bono' services such as, academic sponsorship, granting of internship positions, provision of basic amenities for rural and community development, to endear itself to its existing subscribers and lure prospective ones. The study equally recommended an improved service delivery by MTN Nigeria to sustain loyalty.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Telecommunication, Advertising, Brand Patronage

1 Introduction

In the Nigerian advertising industry, the issue of endorsement is becoming more popular by the day with movie personalities and sport stars like Olamide (Badoo), Timaya, Kanu, Juliet Ibrahim, Basket mouth, Bovi, P Square, Korede Bello, D Banj, Funke Akindele (Jenifa), Hafeez Oyetoro (Saka) dotting the faces of billboards, as well as featuring on radio and television commercials as products/services endorsers. One of the major objectives of advertising is to create brand awareness so that consumers recall the brand name outside the store and/or recognize it inside the store at the time of purchase (Rossiter & Percy, 1997). Existing literature affirms the superior role of a celebrity in enhancing brand name recall over a non-celebrity (Friedman & Friedman, 1979).

Researchers have studied attitude towards brand and brand preference from different perspectives (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999; Nam-Hyun Um, 2008). Models of how advertising works suggest that, attitude towards the brand has an important intermediate effect on brand acceptability, leading to behavioural intention and choice (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). Celebrity endorsement is expected to create brand preference so that target consumers of the recommended product end up exhibiting a positive buying behaviour. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), cited by Erfgen (2011), a brand can be seen as "a name, term, sign, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or

service as distinct from those of other sellers” (p. 43). It is used to differentiate a particular brand from others and to identify products’ or services’ unique features. Although the use of endorsers as marketing device is an age long practice, the trend of engaging celebrities to testify to the value of a product is becoming more grounded as consumers continually play active roles in product choice making. Belch and Belch (2009) observed that, consumers are likely to be influenced by a message coming from someone with whom they feel a sense of similarity. Thus, the product leverages on the potentials of the endorser to influence prospective consumers.

Recently, in the telecommunication industry, celebrity endorsement has taken an entirely different dimension in which an endorser leaves the brand it represents to represent another competing brand as it was in the case of ‘Saka’ who switched from Etisalat network to a competing brand; MTN. However, little works have been done on the impact of endorsers’ switch from one competing brand to another on brand patronage, especially, among students. One begins to imagine the underlining motive behind the action of “Saka”, who ended his transactions with Etisalat, to engage MTN in a similar relationship. Is the actor, ‘Saka’, trying to convince his fans that MTN is better than Etisalat? Did he expect the customers that he had attracted to Etisalat to port with him to MTN? Do Celebrities have much influence on customers’ decision making? An attempt to seek answers to these questions led this study to aim at:

1. assessing the perception of the telecommunication subscribers in University of Lagos on the “I don port campaign”
2. examining the impact of the celebrity endorser on the decision of telecommunication subscribers in University of Lagos on porting to MTN Nigeria.
3. ascertaining the rationale behind the use of an endorser of an existing brand to advertise a competing brand as against engaging a different celebrity endorser;
4. establishing other factors that motivated telecommunication subscribers in University of Lagos to switch to other networks.

2. Brand Endorsement and Testimonial Advertising

Testimonial is a very potent means of advertising in which satisfied customers make statements in favour of a product or service in order to increase consumers’ interest in the products/services. Companies use this strategy very effectively by featuring their high-end customers to testify about their products/services. This type of advertising lends credence to the benefits of using a product or service on account of its being tested and trusted by a satisfied prominent customer in the community of the target customer; and invariably, aiding prospective customers in decision making about the product or service, (Belch & Belch, 2001) Endorsements and testimonials do not suffer medium limitations as they can be used in television, radio spots, direct mail, business fliers and magazine/newspaper advertisements.

2.1 Celebrity Endorsements

Roll cited in Miryala and Mennakanti (2016), described celebrities as people who are widely known to the public for their accomplishments in their respective fields, be it in the entertainment industry, sports, politics, academics etc. In a market with a very high proliferation of local, regional and international brands, celebrity endorsement is thought to provide a distinct differentiation. In his study, Mustafa cited in Jain (2011) state that, although it is possible to employ unsung models for a fraction of the price celebrities charge, the high price would be inconsequential when compared to the quality of patronage the special qualities of the celebrity are expected to attract to the business. This type of endorsement is, most often, employed by major companies engaged in multi-million dollar marketing campaigns, but can also be utilized by smaller companies engaged in local or regional business activities.

2.2 Endorsement In Advertising and Attention Catcher

The attention an endorsed product/service gets is dependent on the credibility of the endorser. Credibility is the extent to which the recipient sees the endorser as having relevant knowledge, skill, or experience and ability to give unbiased, objective information (Belch & Belch, 2009). Other attributes of endorser's credibility are expertise and trustworthiness. Expectedly, when a credible celebrity endorses a product, the consumers are more likely to be favourably disposed to patronizing the product/service arising from a process of internalization. The endorser attractiveness model posits that the acceptance of a message depends on the attractiveness of the source, which in turn depends on the central attributes of familiarity, likability, and similarity. In applying similarity, advertisers assert the likelihood of prospective consumers being influenced by a message or testimony coming from someone with whom they feel a sense of similarity in terms of demographics and psychographics. Belch and Belch (2009) are of the view that, communication becomes more effective and that the position advocated by the source would be better understood by the receiver if both actors have similar needs, goals, interest and lifestyles.

Hence, the huge investment of businesses in endorsement advertising is to attract and sustain the loyalty of target consumers (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2005) by using personalities that will attract the target audience's attention such as actors, athletes, music stars and attractive models. The ability of an endorser to catch and sustain interest in a product/service can be in three categories:

i. Expert Endorsement

This form of advertising highlights the opinions of acknowledged experts about a particular product or service. An expert endorser; who must possess required skills and training about the product/service of interest, must have evaluated the process using appropriate techniques with supporting evidence in the form of tests, evaluations, and or product comparisons.

ii. Consumer Endorsement

This type of endorsement features actual users of the product or service being sold. Such person must reflect the typical experiences of a consumer who must be a convincingly habitual user of the product/service to account for his/her genuine feelings and findings after using the product/service.

iii. Organisation Endorsement

Endorsement from organisations must reflect the consensus of the organisation and must comply with that organisation's standards of formal endorsement. In addition, the organisation in question has to be an independent one and not an affiliate of the producing firm or one created wholly or partially for the purpose of promoting the advertising firm's products or services.

Extant literature affirms that, corporate bodies utilize celebrity endorsement strategy to overcome the challenge of product rejection by consumers (Wei, 2018). A study by Friedman and Freidman cited in Roy (2012) showed that celebrities are more effective to use than an expert or a typical consumer, in sustaining recall of the advertisement and the brand name of the product regardless of the type of product. This assumption is confirmed by the response of black browsers in a study on peoples' response to testimonial adverts on the internet by Appiah and Gregory (2013). The study report that, although white browsers in general respond no differently to a commercial site whether it features black character testimonial adverts, white character testimonial adverts, or no advert testimonial adverts, black browsers do respond differently to commercial sites based on the race of the character used in the testimonial adverts. Essentially, Atkins (2003) observe that, adverts featuring celebrity figures produce more favourable advert evaluation ratings and product image, but not believability of the adverts nor the likelihood of actually purchase.

2.3 Name and Image: The Celebrity Selling Point

The greatest assets of a celebrity are his or her name and image which must have been built over time. In other words, an artist's creativity builds an impressive image for him or her and this in turn add financial value when engaged as a brand ambassador. According to Dahlgren (2011), an artist with a strong and exclusive personality or fame, will be able to attract the attention of companies who wish to have his/her identity with a product. Such talent can increase recognition and acceptance of a brand by tapping into the consumer's passion for the personality and image of the celebrities and this, in turn, can boost sales through persuasion.

2.4 Persuasiveness of Celebrity Endorsement in Advertising

Persuasion plays a key role in advertising and has been variously conceived. Benoit and Benoit (2008) defined persuasion as a process in which a source (persuader) uses a message to achieve a goal by creating, changing, or reinforcing the attitudes of others (the audiences). But in the views of Gass and Seiter (2011) persuasion is akin to influence with a slight difference in operation. Persuasion can be geared towards influencing the belief, attitude, intention, motivation or behaviour of others. In comparison, while the Benois (2008) defined persuasion through its working process and mechanism, Gass and Seiter (2011) focused much on its relationship with influence. Similarly, Schacter *et al.* cited in Rocca, Draunstein and Vazquez (2014) advanced that persuasion can be interpreted as using one's personal or positional resources to change people's "behaviors or attitudes". However, in order to demonstrate persuasion more explicitly, they classified persuasion into two kinds: systematic persuasion and heuristic persuasion. Systematic persuasion is the process through which attitudes or beliefs are changed by appeals to logic and reason. Heuristic persuasion, on the other hand, is the process through which attitudes or beliefs are changed because of appeals to habit or emotion. Obviously, the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsement in advertising; the focus of this paper, is mainly the consequence of heuristic persuasion.

A. Criteria for successful celebrity endorsement

Till and Shrimp (2005) mentioned some principles that can be used when regarding more celebrity for endorsement in order to enhance brand equity. These include the fact that:

- Celebrity endorsement will be more effective when used over time to increase the strength of the link between celebrity and the endorsed brand.
- Celebrity endorsement will be more effective when using a celebrity who is not associated with any other product.
- Celebrity endorsement will be more effective to brands that consumers have limited knowledge about.
- Celebrity endorsement will be more effective when the advertisement is simple, clean and free of irrelevant facts, focus on the celebrity and the brand.

The uncompromising position of the consumer in making a choice from a multitude of competing brands can be inferred from the seminal study of Elihu (1959), who posited that, the audience or consumer actively process available information, features and options that surround a product before taking a decision for or against it. This submission compliments the assertion that, no product, irrespective of its unique value proposition, is complete until it enjoys favourable consideration of the consumer.

B. Challenges to successful celebrity endorsement

However, there are some inherent potential disadvantages and hazards in utilizing celebrities as endorsers as a part of marketing communication strategy. For instance, a sudden drop in the fame of the celebrity that endorsed a particular product or service will have a ripple effect on acceptance of the product/service. In other words, there could be a transfer of feelings towards an endorser to the product being endorsed in which case, a negative information about a celebrity endorser would not only influence consumers' perception of the celebrity, but also the endorsed product (White, Goddard & Wilbur, 2009, Till & Shimp, 2005). One must not discountenance the possible loss of credibility by over-endorsing or overshadow endorsed products (Cooper in Kaikati, 2007) in which case, the fame of the endorser overshadows the product/service being advertised leading to the consumers focusing their attention on the celebrity but failing to notice the brand being promoted (Rossiter & Percy, 2008).

2.5 Celebrity Endorsement Switch (I DON PORT)

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) announced the number portability option for customers which allows subscribers to migrate from one mobile network provider to another without requiring the acquisition of a new SIM nor phone number (Nigeria communication commission, 2013). This necessitated the jostle for increased patronage by all communication network providers by the use of different strategies. One of the strategies employed was a new phenomenon in celebrity endorsement known as celebrity switch; where a celebrity that has been well known with a particular brand enters into an agreement to represent another competing brand thereby, transferring his emotional and physical attachment from the erstwhile brand to the new contracted brand with the expectation that his fans will follow suit. This was true of MTN Nigeria which attracted a popular television and movie comedian, Hafees Oyetoro (Saka) to switch from ETISALAT Nigeria to MTN Nigeria under the portability network.

The MTN Mobile Number Portability (MNP) was aimed at winning or swaying customers over to MTN network as a better and reliable network as symbolized by Saka who had been promoting Etisalat all the while and found it expedient to port to MTN with such ease as projected in the advert. Little researches have been conducted to establish the viability of the strategy, because of its novelty in the Nigerian Telecommunication Industry. The brand ambassador role of Saka, the former Etisalat brand ambassador who switched to MTN with the 'I DON PORT' advert was first aired on Monday 22nd April, 2013 when MTN launched its Mobile Portability Network (MNP) has become a controversial one. The two telecommunication network or brands discussed in this study are the Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN) Nigeria, which is the largest member of the MTN Group, a South African company with many subsidiaries spread across the world (21 countries in Africa and the Middle East). It was one of three initial Global Systems for Mobile Communication (GSM) companies licensed by the National Communications Commission (NCC) to provide telecommunications services to the Nigerian public. It commenced operations in August 2001 and has ever since been the biggest Telecommunication companies and one of the largest in all of Nigeria and ETISALAT (Chioma, Morgan, Onuiri & Ogungbamigbe., 2016).

In their study of the Impact of MTN's "I Don Port" Television Campaign on Porting Decision of GSM Subscribers, Chioma, Morgan, Onuiri, Ernest and Ogungbamigbe (2016) examined the rate of porting by other communication network subscribers in Ajuwon Alagbole, Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State to MTN after being exposed to the campaign. Their findings revealed that the use of celebrity endorsement was not an assurance that the respondents would port to MTN from other networks even though, it created further awareness about MTN. This finding lends credence to the aphorism in business climes that 'the consumer is king'. However, Chioma et.al. (2016) reported the limitation of the respondents from their study area (Ajuwon Alagbole, Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State) in

comprehending the cause and effect of the promotion; hence, the need to conduct this study among elites such as students of the University of Lagos.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a survey method with a convenience sampling technique. Three hundred and eighty one (381) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the students in their various halls and classes in April, 2017, but 310 were adequately filled and returned for analysis. Data was descriptively analysed and presented in tables and percentages.

4. Results Presentation

Table 1 shows that 46 percent of the respondents (143) were in 200, 16 percent (50) were in 300 level with 15.4 percent (48), 14 percent (44) and 8 percent (25) in 100, 400 and 500 levels respectively. Responses to enquiry about the network subscribed to revealed a very close range between Glo subscribers (34.8 %) and Etisalat subscribers (34.5%). 20% of the respondents subscribe to MTN while the remaining 20% subscribe to Airtel. When asked whether they pay attention to advert at all, 185 (59.3%) answer in the affirmative while 125 (40.3%) said otherwise. In response to enquiry about exposure to ‘I don port’ campaign, 55.5% (172) of the respondents say they watch the advert while 44.5 (128) of them say they don’t. In all, 57.7 percent (179) of the respondents say they like the advert while 42.3 percent (131) of them felt otherwise.

TABLE 1: Distribution of respondents by selected variables

Variable	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Level	100	48	15.4
	200	143	46.1
	300	50	16.1
	400	44	14.1
	500	25	8.0
	Total	310	100.0
Subscription to Network	MTN	62	20
	ETISALAT	107	34.5
	GLO	108	34.8
	AIRTEL	33	10.7
	Total	310	100.0
Attention to MTN advert	Yes	185	59.7
	No	125	40.3
	Total	310	100.0
Exposure to ‘I Don Port’ advert	Yes	172	55.5
	No	138	45.5
	Total	310	100
Like the advert	Yes	179	57.7
	No	131	42.3
	Total	310	100

RQ1: what is the perception of the University of Lagos telecommunication subscribers about the “I don port campaign”

To assess the perception of the respondents about the campaign, the study sought information on the rating of their likeness for the advert. 45.2 percent of them (140) attest that they like it very much while 14.5 percent (45) confess that they like it much. One can therefore, infer that the respondents perceive the advert favourably.

RQ2: *What is the impact of celebrity endorsement switch (saka port) on the telecommunication subscribers?.*

The linear regression analysis was used to test the significance of celebrity endorsement on switch to other telecommunication networks. Table 2 shows there is no significant influence of celebrity endorsement on brand patronage with $R^2 = .003$, $p = .372$. Celebrity endorsement which happens to be the independent variable does not affect or influence brand patronage.

Table 2: Regression analysis of influence of celebrity porting on brand patronage

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.051 ^a	.003	-.001	1.72851	.003	.799	1	308	.372
a. Predictors: (Constant), ind									

This is corroborated by the dichotomous responses to the item that sought information on whether the advert motivated the respondents to switch. Findings indicate that, only 39.9 percent (105) admit to be motivated to switch while 66.1 percent (205) claim not to be motivated. This implies that the “I don port” campaign did not motivate majority of the respondents to switch to Mtn Nigeria.

Table 3: Motivation to port based on exposure to ‘I don port’ campaign.

Variable	options	frequency	Percentage
Motivation to port as a result of exposure to campaign	Yes	105	33.9
	No	205	66.1
	Total	310	100.0

RQ3: Would you prefer the use of another endorser instead of an endorser of a competing brand?

Although the majority of the respondents, 66.4% (206) consider the ‘I don port’ campaign to be good, only 39.4 percent (122) are obliged to be influenced to switch by the campaign while 60.6 percent (188) were not much influenced. When asked to describe the benefit that accrued to them for watching the campaign, 64.8 percent (201) of the total respondents said that the advertisement only increased the publicity of the MTN and not patronage while the remaining 35.2 percent (109) expressed that it increased patronage as contained in Table 4.

Findings in Table 5 show that respondents that preferred another celebrity rather than “Saka” (I don port) occupy 61.9 percent and 38.1per cent of the total number of respondents respectively said no, This implies that majority of the respondents prefers a new face or celebrity in the advertisement. In other words, another celebrity would have been preferred in the “I don port” advert.

Table 4: Role of celebrity endorser on porting decisions

Variable	options	frequency	Percentage
view about celebrities in advertising campaigns	Very Good	64	20.6
	Good	142	45.8
	Bad	44	14.2
	Indifferent	60	19.4
	Total	310	100.0
influence of celebrity advert on switch to MTN Nigeria	Very Much	60	19.4
	Much	62	20.0
	Little	160	51.6
	Very Little	28	9.0
	Total	310	100.0
Benefit of the campaign to consumers	Increased Patronage	109	35.2
	Increase Publicity	201	64.8
	Total	310	100.0

TABLE 5: Respondents preference for another celebrity other than Saka

Variable	Options	Frequency	percentage
Preference for another celebrity	Yes	192	61.9
	No	118	38.1
	Total	310	100.0

Q4. *what other factors motivate telecommunication subscribers to “switch” from one network to another ?*

Table 6 shows that apart from celebrity endorsement, 40.3 percent of the respondents (125) are motivated by the product availability, 26.1 percent (81) by the quality of service, 20.6 percent (64) by affordable tariff while other factors that were not captured by the available response options account for 12.9 percent (40).

TABLE 6: distribution of other factors that motivate respondents to patronize MTN Nigeria aside from celebrity endorsement.

Variable	Options	Frequency	percentage
Other motivating factors	Availability	125	40.3
	Quality	81	26.1
	Affordale tarrif	64	20.6
	Others	40	12.9
	Total	310	100.0

5. Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study reveal that the telecommunication subscribers in University of Lagos are favourably disposed to the MTN “I don port campaign”. The heuristic nature of the campaign and the comic personality of its endorser makes it acceptable to the subscribers. This agrees with the outcome of the study conducted by Chioma, Morgan, Onuiri, Ernest and Ogungbamigbe (2016) that says a large percentage of telecommunication subscribers like the “I don port”. MTN campaign.

However, the subscribers’ professed favourable perception of the campaign does not translate to its having a significant impact on the decision of telecommunication subscribers in University of Lagos to port to MTN Nigeria. Considering the fact that MTN Nigeria can be regarded as an established brand, one may want to agree with the submission of Till and Shrimp (2005) that celebrity endorsement is most suitable for brands that consumers have limited knowledge about; hence, the insignificant relationship between the two concepts.

The curiosity of these researchers in ascertaining the rationale behind the use of an endorser of an existing brand to advertise a competing brand as against engaging a different celebrity was addressed by the respondents’ disclosure that would have preferred the engagement of another celebrity to endorse MTN rather than a face that was already known with an existing competing product. This finding resonates with the submission of Till and Shrimp (2005) that celebrity endorsement would be more effective if the endorser is not associated with other products. Not only is Saka associated with other products in this instance, he is associated with a competing product within the same industry.

The sampled telecommunication subscribers in University of Lagos confirmed that there were other factors that can motivate them to switch to other networks. Some the factors mentioned include: ‘pro bono’ services such as, academic sponsorship, granting of internship positions, provision of basic amenities for rural and community development, quality service delivery, and adequate compensation for long time customers in order to endear itself to its existing subscribers and lure prospective ones

6. Conclusion

The study has contributed to literature on the impact of advertising on product patronage. Specifically, it has confirmed that, although the packaging of the ‘I don port’ campaign is liked by the respondents, the likeness is not strong motivation for them to switch to MTN network as aspired. Impliedly, celebrity endorser switch does not impact positively on product patronage, thus complimenting the findings of Chioma, et . al (2016), despite the differences in the locations of study. However, the campaign has increased the popularity of the product despite the fact that MTN is a house-hold communication network provider. It further reveals that factors like quality service delivery, affordable tariff top the list of factors that can influence subscribers to port from one network to another.

7. Recommendations

In line with the findings in this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. MTN Nigeria should engage in more ‘pro bono’ services such as, academic sponsorship, granting of internship positions, provision of basic amenities for rural and community development, to endear itself to its existing subscribers and lure prospective ones;
2. The service provider should improve on its service delivery to sustain loyalty;

3. The network providers should seek out more constructive ways of wooing subscribers rather than using heuristic strategies alone;
4. MTN Nigeria should improve in its quality of service in order to retain its customers and attract new ones;
5. MTN Nigeria must ensure adequate compensation for long time customers' loyalty to win and sustain the commitment of its subscribers against porting.
6. Communication network providers should carry out more audience studies to know the values of their existing and prospective subscribers;

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