

# CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION OF THE USE OF CELEBRITIES IN ADVERTISING BY MTN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *Celebrity endorsement is one of the advertising techniques companies use to create awareness and gain favourable responses about their products and services. This expectation may not be often realised as negative image about a celebrity endorser, incongruity of a celebrity endorser with the product being endorsed are all capable of inducing bad responses towards the product rather than the other way round. This study therefore examined the influence of use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria advertisements on University of Nigeria Nsukka undergraduate students. Survey method was adopted and questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Findings of the research among others revealed that celebrity endorsed advert has a significant influence on customers' purchase intention. This study however, recommends that, care must be taken to scrutinize a celebrity's lifestyle and the person's present social acceptance before endorsement so as to avoid any negative image that could have negative effect on the product. Also, companies should ensure that their products are of high quality before asking celebrities to endorse their products. A product of poor quality would undermine the essence of paying a lot for celebrity endorsement.*

**Key Words:** Advertising, Celebrities, Influence, MTN Nigeria.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Advertising is a form of marketing communication. Uwem, Iniobong and Inyene (2015, p.217) aver that advertising entails the persuasion of an audience or consumer to take some action with respect to products, ideas or services. More commonly, the desired result is to drive consumer behaviour with respect to a commercial offering. For these purposes, advertisements often contain both factual information and persuasive messages. According to Reichert, Heckler and Jackson (2001, p.6), advertising is an applied form of persuasion that attempts to inform, position, convince, reinforce, differentiate and ultimately sell products and services.

Advertising has been with us for centuries, although it is a lot different from what it was decades ago. In representing the modern practices of advertising, Arens (2006, p. 7) defines advertising as "the structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media". Every mass medium is used to deliver these persuasive messages, including radio, movies, magazine, newspapers, video games, the Internet, billboards and, especially, the television, which is a unique medium of advertising, incorporating the elements of sound, picture and motion.

In present day marketing activities, hardly is there any business in the modern world which does not advertise (Asemah, Edegoh and Ojih, 2013). However, the form of advertisement differs from business to business. There is increasing spate of the ways and manners in which celebrities are being used in advertising in terms of promoting the industry's business and corporate image, with a view to providing useful information for effective decision making among consumers. Therefore, as companies and corporate organizations strive to invest large sums of money in celebrity endorsement contracts, any celebrity endorsement relationship must, as a matter of fact, contribute to larger marketing strategies (Erdogan and Kitchen, 1998). Accordingly, campaigns involving celebrities are believed to bring more positive results if they are properly integrated than traditional non-integrated campaigns.

Prior to the advent of GSM in 2001, phone penetration was low to the verge of negligible. Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (Nitel) had the monopoly. But all that changed with the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) revolution brought by the licensing of Econet Wireless companies, Mtel, MTN Nigeria and the later entry of Glo and Etisalat into the industry. At first, all that was needed for marketing success was availability. Because the demand for phone was far more than the supply, these companies were on a roll, snapping subscribers

after subscribers from phone starved Nigerians. That has since changed. The landscape is becoming more competitive and the growth rates of yesteryears are becoming hard to replicate. In a nutshell, continued success in the contemporary Nigerian GSM market calls for marketing wizardry.

MTN Nigeria is one of the biggest spenders in the use of local celebrities in advertising and marketing strategies, but just recently they have splashed over NGN500m celebrity endorsement advertising. This is the first time it is spending heavily on brand endorsements – an area hitherto monopolised by competitor **Globacom**. **Hence, the study is geared towards ascertaining the trends in the use of celebrities in advertising and market penetration as we are witnessing today in telecommunication industry.**

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:**

The most important role of advertising is to sell product, service, idea, etc. In recent years business has attracted so much competition that there is great need for carefully designed and constructive messages that could be used to persuade a consumer to become loyal to a brand.

Similarly, the number of GSM users in Nigeria is increasing on daily basis. Could it be that the heavy consumption of a particular telecommunication service provider is related to the use of testimonial advertising or has the heavy consumption arisen as a result of other factors? To this end, one wonders if actually the testimonial creative approach used by most telecommunication operators in advertising can influence consumer patronage of the advertised brand.

In spite of the many assumed benefits inherent in the use of popular celebrities in advertising, there is still a raging argument regarding the efficacy and effectiveness of these models to pass across the intended message (and nothing more) to the buyers.

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- To find out the level of awareness of MTN Nigeria celebrity adverts by the respondents.
- To find out the perception of respondents on the use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria adverts.
- To ascertain the extent celebrity endorsed advertising influence the patronage of MTN Nigeria services.
- To find out the effectiveness of the use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria advertisement.

## **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- To what extent are the respondents aware of the usage of celebrities for adverts by MTN Nigeria?
- How do respondents perceive the use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria adverts?
- Does celebrity endorsed MTN Nigeria advertising influences the patronage of MTN services?
- What is the effectiveness of the use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria advertisement?

## **5. OVERVIEW OF ADVERTISING:**

Advertising according to Aka, Okorie and Kehinde (2015, p.3) is a potent vehicle for achieving acceptance of desirable and useful concepts or ideas where the profit motive is minimal or missing altogether. Okorie (2009) reasoned that advertising has become an integral part of our social and economic system; it is indeed a powerful communication tool of business to most firms and organizations for them to be able to reach their target market across the globe. In other words, advertising can be seen as a form of communication intended to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to purchase or take some action upon products, ideas, or services.

Advertising is part of the marketing activities of a company, and part of the range of communications that can support a brand. Marketing, as a business discipline, can be thought of as the essential interface between a business and its customers or consumers. It is marketing's job to ensure that the business is promoted to optimum expectations, and also provide customers with what they want rather than trying to unload on them what the business has to sell or what is available for the business to sell. (Bovee & Thrill, 2003)

Advertising is one of the constituents of the marketing mix that goes to build the brand. Advertising exist to help sell things; in the case of off-the page direct response ads, they actually do sell things, but mostly the process is less direct than this. Advertising is mainly about the brand- it is designed, consciously or unconsciously, to create and strengthen consumer impressions of the brand advertised so that they will more likely buy it or buy it more often (Wright, 2010).

## **6. THE PLACE OF CELEBRITIES IN ADVERTISING:**

In today's competitive business world, consumers are exposed to thousands of voices and images in magazines, newspapers, and on billboards, websites, radio and television. Mwendwa and Mberia (2014, p.179) assert that advertisers attempt to steal at least a fraction of a person's time to inform him or her of the amazing and different attributes of the product at hand. Because of the constant media saturation that most people experience daily, they eventually become numb to the standard marketing techniques. The challenge of the marketer is to find a hook that

will hold the consumer's attention such as media message content and the hooks that can hold the consumer's attention are the celebrities.

Advertising is said to be any paid form of non-personal communication about organization, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor (Belch and George, 1995). To do so advertisers employ several of marketing techniques and celebrity endorsement is one of them. The term celebrity refers to an individual who is known to the public (actor, sports figure, entertainer, etc.) for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Celebrity is also a person, who has a prominent profile and commands some degree of public fascination and influence in day-to-day news media. The term is often denoted as a person with fame and fortune implied with great popular appeal, prominence in a particular field, and is easily recognized by the general public.

The term celebrity is associated with individuals who are frequently in the public eye and typically have a high profile in sports, entertainment industries among others. They are used to endorse services, products, ideas or organizations (Black Jay et al, 1995).

Endorsement is a channel of communication where celebrities act as spokesperson of the brand and by extending their popularity and personality they certify the brand's claim and position (Kotler, 2009).

Celebrity endorsement if used effectively makes the brand stand out, enhances brand recall and facilitates instant awareness. Celebrity Endorsement is a way to get the brand noticed amidst the rush that is there in the market place. Celebrities like film stars and cricketers have not only been successful in gathering huge public attention, but also in increasing sales volume (Mwendwa and Mberia, 2014, p.181).

The huge investments of companies in advertising are not without motives, as companies try to outsmart each other with their advertisements in order to obtain a domineering share and win customers' favour. Apejoye (2013, p.2), observed that, in the United States of America, for instance, 20% of all commercials incorporate a celebrity endorser.

Byrne argues that:

. . . a celebrity can build, refresh and add new dimensions. What celebrities stand for enhances a brand and they save valuable time in terms of creating the credibility a company has created in order to build its brand by transferring the values to the brand. When consumers see a credible celebrity endorse a product, they think the company must be okay.

In fact, research has shown that people are likely to patronise. As a result, most advertisers indulge in the use of personalities that enjoy public acceptance and credibility to appear in the adverts and endorse their product, as most believe that it can heighten product identification among consumers, facilitate audience recall, and influence the purchase intentions of consumers. Friedman and Friedman (1979) and Tripp et al (1994) in their various findings assert the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement as a veritable strategy in influencing consumers to have favourable attitudes towards products endorsed by celebrities.

Pickton and Broderick (2005, p.56) state that celebrity endorsement of products is of particular interest to the marketing communicator and is used quite extensively. The link between the meaning(s) associated with the celebrity and to promote a company or product brand (Belch & Belch, 1998). Marketers and advertisers expect that celebrity endorsement in advertising will increase the impact of advertisement by appealing to companies' target consumers group or the life experiences of endorsers fit the advertising message.

Celebrity endorsement is an advertising strategy whereby companies use people of public recognition as spokespersons for their products. It is frequently used in recent times by companies in order to increase sales and perhaps extend their market share. According to Belch and Belch (2001), most of the celebrities that are hired by a company to pitch their products or services are popular people, movie stars, entertainers, athletes, or pop-stars, although occasionally a politician or some other well-known public figure may be used. For instance, Kanu Nvankwo leads the way, featuring in multi-category endorsements from peak milk to pepsi soft drink, to USAIDS/NACA anti-AIDS campaign among long list of other notable brands and currently Startimes. Other high profile endorsers include Taribo West for money gram, Sunday Olise for western union money transfer, Banky W for Etisalat, Pete Edochie, Jide Kosoko, and Saint Obi for Boska pain reliever, Tuface Idibia for airtel Nigeria, D. Banj for virgin Nigeria Airlines, Kate Henshaw for Onga food, Stella Darnasus for Delta soap, Sunny Neji, Jim lyke, Ini Edo, and Uche Jumbo for Glo.

When a company decides upon using celebrity endorsement, the main focus lies in exposing their brand (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong, 2001). To be able to develop an effective campaign, a company has to select their endorser appropriate to different channels and media, such as source, message, and receiver (Till and Shimp, 1998).

MTN Nigeria has not been left out in this potent use of celebrities in advertising. As a matter of fact, one memorable example of how the use of celebrity in adverts can be powerful is seen in MTN's poaching of rival company Etisalat's spokesperson, Hafiz Oyetoro popularly known as Saka. He is a well-known Nigerian actor and comedian and was the celebrity face for Etisalat. When the Nigerian government introduced Mobile Number Portability (MNP) in the country in 2013, MTN Nigeria offered Saka a N20m deal to become its celebrity endorser. It was really very powerful because everybody knew him and that he was the spokesperson for Etisalat and most people had heard about new laws that allowed them to switch service providers. It created a lot of hype and was recorded as quite bold move by MTN and a good move in terms of connecting with consumers and getting the message out there.

# MTN splashes N500m on endorsement deals



Meanwhile, MTN Nigeria threw out their first endorsement deal in April 2012 when they hired the services of then, 19-year-old pop singer Davido as the ambassador for MTN Pulse, a new marketing campaign for Nigerian youths called '*MTN Fun Link*'. The deal was reportedly worth N30m. It took 13 months for the next set of endorsement deals to come, this time to three past winners of *Project Fame*, a show solely sponsored by MTN telecom company. Singers like Iyanya, Mike Anyansodo, Chidinma and Praiz. MTN Nigeria also has long chain of celebrities in it adverts. People like Don Jazzy, Tiwa Savag, Kcee, Dr. Sid etc.

## 7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This work is anchored on the uses and gratification theory, agenda setting theory, and the psychodynamic theory. Uses and gratifications theory is one of the theories of mass communication that call attention to what people do with the media rather than what the media do to people. It was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. The theory assumes that people influence the effects that mass media have on them (Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso, 2008, p.71). The assumption of the theory is that people are not just passive receivers of media messages but actively influence the message effects. This is because people selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain mass media messages on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc. Thus, Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008, p.71) rightly assert that there are as many reasons for using the media as there are media users.

Uses and gratifications theory holds that media consumers have a free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them.

The relevance of the theory to the study cannot be overemphasized because it perceives recipients of media offerings as actively influencing the effect process, since they selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain media messages. Agenda setting theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973 (Asemah, 2011, p.176). The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listened to or watched in different mass media (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012). The media make us to think about certain issues: they make us to think that certain issues are more important than others in our society. According to Wimmer and Dominic (2000) agenda setting theory of mass media proposes that public agenda or what kinds of things people talk about, think or worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicize.



## 8. METHODOLOGY:

The research design for this work is survey method. Asemah et al (2012, p.107) states that “a survey is an empirical study that uses questionnaire or interview to discover descriptive characteristics of a phenomenon”. They further explained that survey is aimed at developing generalised proposition about human behaviours from what is observed in a sampled population. Ohaja (2013, p.74) advises that whenever the major source of primary data for a study would be the views of members of the public or any particular group, a survey should be called for.

The population of the study is all under graduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the 2015/2016 academic session which has a total population of 15, 998 according to the information obtained from the school records. Using Australia sample size calculator, 376 students were picked as sample size from the population. Copies of Questionnaire were used as instrument for data collection whereas purposive sampling technique was used to administer the copies of questionnaire to students at strategic places around the campus. Ohaja (2003, p.82) contends that:

Purposive sampling is used when a researcher seeks certain characteristics in his sampling element and he wants to ensure that those chosen have those characteristics. He therefore, eliminates other members of the population and works with those that meet the requirements.

It means therefore, that this technique is most congruent with this study since the researchers seek to reach only those in the population whom they believe are competent enough to supply the desired, relevant and reliable data.

## 9. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.

**Table 1: SEX DISTRIBUTION**

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES
Male	161	43%
Female	215	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

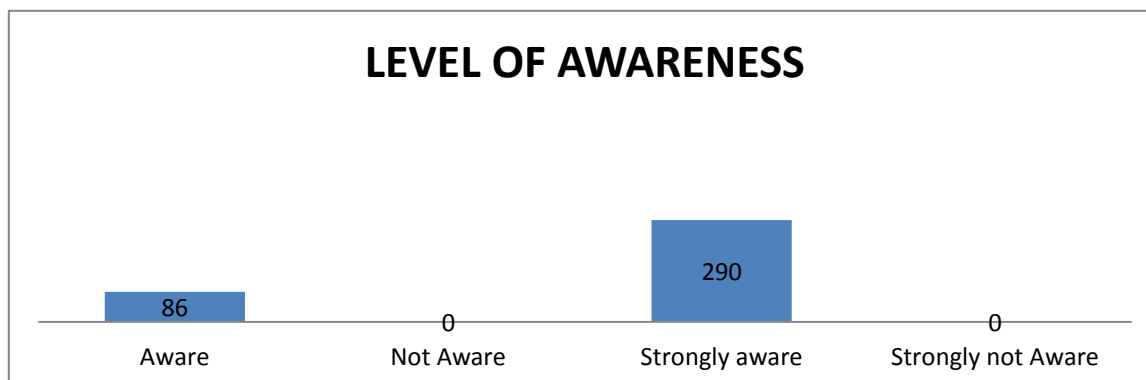
The number of male respondents as shown above was 161 (43%) while that of female was 215 (57%) which gave us the total number of 376 (100%).

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1.** To what extent are the respondents aware of usage of celebrities for adverts by MTN Nigeria?

**TABLE 2. LEVEL OF AWARENESS**

level of awareness	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES
Aware	86	23%
Not aware	00	00%
Strongly aware	290	77%
Strongly not aware	00	00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

From the table above, it is discovered that 23% of the respondents are **aware** of the use of celebrities in advertisement of MTN's product and services. Majority of the respondents with 77% are **strongly aware** of the use of celebrities in MTN's advertisement.



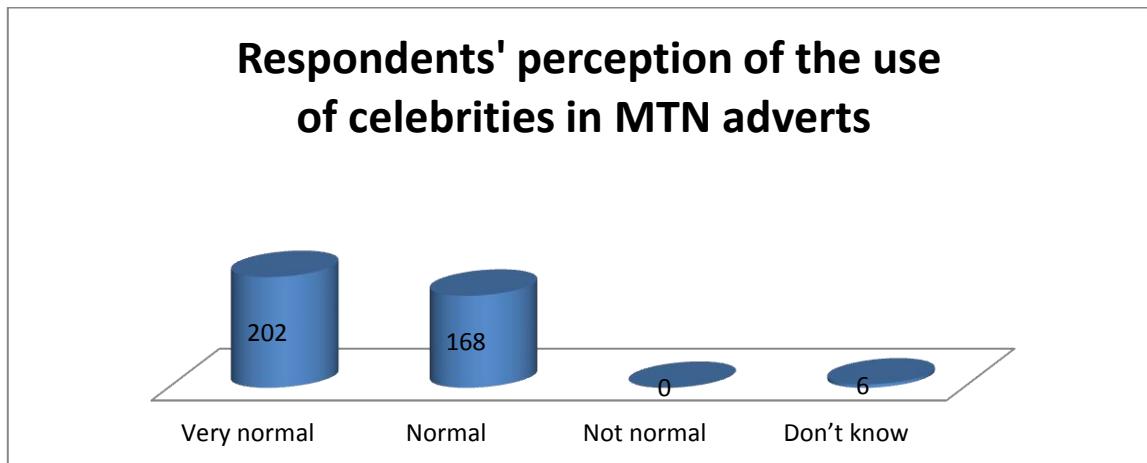
**Fig.1 level of awareness**

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2.** How do respondents perceive the use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria adverts?

**TABLE 3. PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE USE OF CELEBRITIES IN MTN NIGERIA ADVERTS**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES
Very normal	202	54%
Normal	168	45%
Not normal	00	00%
Don't know	06	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

In table 3, as many as 202 (54%) respondents are of the view that MTN's advertisement using celebrities is **very normal** while 168 (45%) see it as **normal**. None of them saw it as **not normal** while insignificant 6 (1%) couldn't decide.



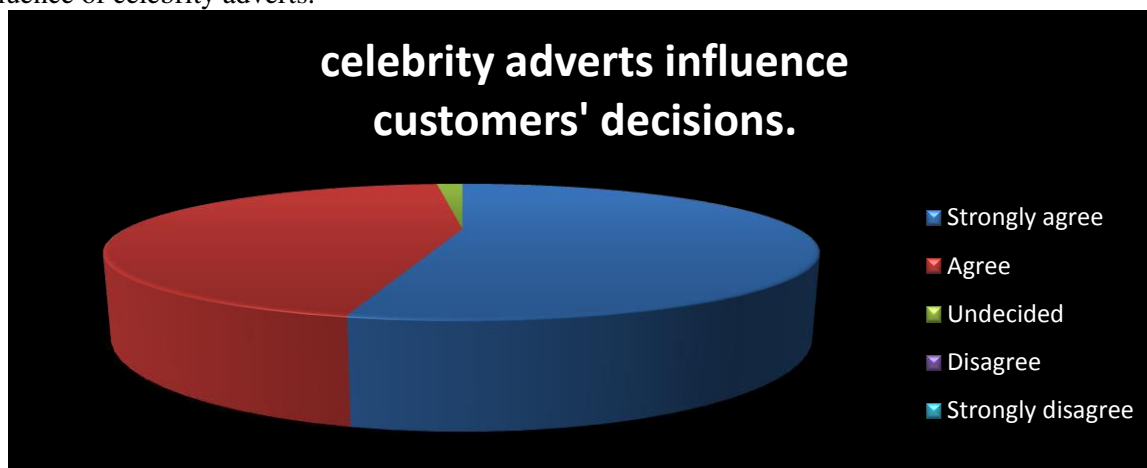
**Fig.2 Respondents perception of the use of celebrities in MTN adverts**

**RESEARCH QUESTION 3.** Do celebrity endorsed MTN advertisements influence the patronage of MTN Nigeria services?

**TABLE 4. CELEBRITY ADVERT INFLUENCES RESPONDENT'S CHOICE?**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES
Strongly agree	202	54%
Agree	168	45%
Undecided	06	01%
Disagree	00	00%
Strongly disagree	00	00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

From table 4 above, it is revealed that majority of the respondents 202 (54%) **strongly agree** that such celebrities advertisement influence their patronage of MTN's services while 168 (45%) just **agree** and 6 (1%) were **undecided** on the influence of celebrity adverts.



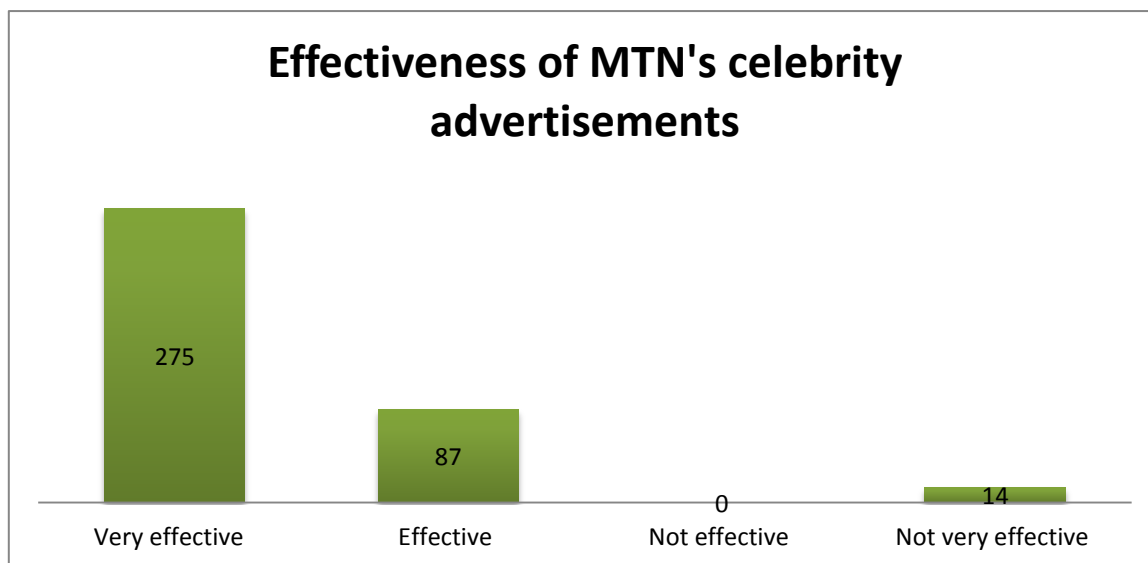
**Fig.2 celebrity adverts influence customer's decisions.**

**RESEARCH QUESTION 4.** What is the effectiveness of the use of celebrities in MTN Nigeria advertisement?

**TABLE 5. EFFECTIVENESS OF MTN's CELEBRITY ADVERTISEMENTS.**

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES
Very effective	275	73.2%
Effective	87	23.1%
Not effective	00	0%
Not very effective	14	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

In determining the effectiveness of MTN's use of celebrities in advertisement, the data tabulated above indicates that 275 (73.2%) of respondents view it as **very effective**, 87 (23.1%) agree that it is just **effective** while those of **not effective** and **not very effective** got 0% and 3.7% respectively.



**Fig.3 Effectiveness of MTN's celebrity advertisements**

#### 10. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

From the data analysed, it is obvious that there a higher percentage of respondents, (77%) who are very familiar and aware of the MTN's use of celebrities in advertisement. It is also evident that as many as 202 (54%) respondents are of the view that MTN Nigeria advertisement using celebrities is very normal while 168 (45%) see it as normal. None of them saw it as not normal while insignificant 6 (1%) couldn't decide. This is in line with Apejaye (2013, p.2) that most advertisers indulge in the use of personalities that enjoy public acceptance and credibility to appear in the adverts and endorse their product, as most believe that it can heighten product identification among consumers, facilitate audience recall, and influence the purchase intentions of consumers.

Moreover, it was gathered that majority of the respondents 202 (54%) strongly agree that such celebrities advertisement influence their patronage of MTN's services while 168 (45%) just agree and 6 (1%) were undecided on the influence of celebrity adverts. In determining the effectiveness of MTN's use of celebrities in advertisement, the data analysed indicates that 275 (73.2%) of respondents view it as very effective, 87 (23.1%) agree that it is just effective while those of not effective and not very effective got 0% and 3.7% respectively. This result agrees with the findings of Ibok (2013, p.234) that the identification of celebrities with the right expertise enables organizations to select those celebrities that they thought are marketably significant and whom they believe will make meaningful contribution to the effectiveness of product advertisement.

#### 11. CONCLUSION:

Advertising is an interesting field that seeks to bring buyers and sellers together with the main objective of satisfying their mutual needs. In other words, advertising business is such that promotes goods, services and ideas using the instrumentality of the mass media i.e. television, radio, newspaper and magazine, to reach a large number of heterogeneous audience.

In today's world, the use of celebrity advertising for companies has become a trend and a perceived winning formula of corporate image building and product marketing. This phenomenon is reflected by the recent market research findings that 8 out of 10 TV commercials scoring the highest recall are those with celebrities' appearances. MTN's usage of celebrity has proven to its customers and competitors that it is making good use of advertising.

## 12. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Companies should ensure that their products are of high quality before asking celebrities to endorse their products. A product of poor quality would undermine the essence of paying a lot for celebrity endorsement.
- Companies must be cautious of the celebrities they select to help advertise their products. Despite the admirable qualities which the members of the public notice with the personality, advertisers should probe into the private life of the celebrity to ensure that the celebrity is actually qualified for use both physically and morally.
- Advertisers should refrain from deceiving the consumers by exaggerating the merits of their products to the consumers.
- Multiple endorsement of more than one product or brand by a celebrity must be discouraged. This is to avoid confusion. The public is confused when a celebrity advertises and endorses more than one product.
- The involvement of celebrities in advertising should be carefully planned and managed because proper selection of celebrities determines the overall effectiveness as well as success of advertising.

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