



MUSIC ARTIST ENDORSEMENT ATTRIBUTES AND SMARTPHONE CHOICE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of music artist endorsement attributes on smartphone choice among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Specifically, it investigated how likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality of music artists affect students' smartphone purchasing decisions. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with a sample of 384 undergraduate students selected through multi-stage and purposive sampling. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire, validated for reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$), and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that all four endorsement attributes positively influence smartphone choice, with likeability being the most influential, followed by physical attractiveness and personality, while credibility had a slightly lower impact. The study highlights the significance of emotional connection, aesthetic appeal, and personal identification with music artists in shaping brand preference among undergraduates. The results support the application of Meaning Transfer Theory, demonstrating that symbolic meanings associated with music artists are transferred to endorsed smartphone brands, influencing consumption behaviour. The study recommends that smartphone companies strategically select endorsers with appealing and relatable traits, emphasise visual and emotional appeal in campaigns, enhance endorser credibility, and integrate endorsements with digital and experiential marketing to reinforce brand loyalty. These findings provide both theoretical and practical insights into youth consumer behaviour in Nigeria, underlining the role of music artist endorsement in contemporary marketing strategies.

Introduction

The global youth population has become one of the most digitally immersed consumer segments of the twenty-first century. Across continents, young people are not merely users of technology; they are active shapers of digital culture. Smartphones, social networking platforms, streaming services, and multimedia applications have become embedded in everyday routines—academic work, social interaction, entertainment, and identity expression. In Nigeria, this transformation is even more visible, as mobile connectivity has expanded rapidly over the past decade. Recent industry reports show that Nigeria's smartphone penetration continues to rise steadily, with young adults forming the largest proportion of active users (GSMA, 2023; Nigerian Communications Commission [NCC], 2024).

For many undergraduates, the smartphone is no longer just a communication device. It is a classroom companion, a creative studio, a banking tool, and a social identity marker. Studies in digital consumer behaviour suggest that young consumers demonstrate faster adoption rates of new mobile technologies and stronger emotional attachment to digital brands than older cohorts (Sultan & Rohm, 2015; Statista, 2024). Beyond functionality, smartphones increasingly serve symbolic purposes—signalling lifestyle, status, and group affiliation. In practical terms, the brand of phone a student carries may communicate as much about self-image as it does about technical capability.

Within this symbolic consumption environment, branding becomes a central driver of purchasing decisions. Branding extends beyond logos or product features; it encompasses perceived meaning, emotional resonance, and social representation. Keller (2013) explains that strong brands create favourable, unique, and memorable associations in the minds of consumers. For youth markets especially, these associations are often constructed through cultural intermediaries—celebrities, influencers, and music artists who embody aspirational identities.

Celebrity endorsement has therefore become a dominant strategy in marketing communication. The theoretical foundation for this strategy is rooted in the Source Credibility Model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1985), which argue that an endorser's trustworthiness, expertise, familiarity, likeability, and attractiveness significantly shape audience attitudes towards advertised products. More recent empirical studies confirm that celebrity endorsement influences brand recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention, particularly among young consumers who strongly identify with popular culture figures (Knoll & Matthes, 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

In Nigeria's advertising landscape, music artists occupy a particularly powerful cultural position. They command massive followings across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. Their fashion choices, speech patterns, lifestyles, and brand affiliations are widely imitated. As a result, telecommunications and smartphone companies frequently engage music artists as brand ambassadors to enhance product visibility and market appeal. The underlying assumption is that the symbolic capital of the artist transfers to the brand, shaping consumer perception and potentially influencing purchase decisions.

However, endorsement effectiveness is not automatic. Research cautions that mere visibility of a celebrity does not guarantee behavioural change (Till & Shimp, 1998; Erdogan, 1999). The persuasive power of endorsement depends on specific attributes of the endorser—such as perceived credibility, likeability, physical attractiveness, and personality congruence with the target audience. When consumers perceive alignment between their own self-concept and the personality of the endorser, they are more likely to develop favourable brand attitudes (Escalas & Bettman, 2017). Conversely, overexposure or multiple endorsements may weaken credibility and reduce persuasive impact.

In the context of Nigerian universities, students are deeply immersed in music culture. Genre preferences, artist loyalty, and fandom communities form part of campus social life. Given this cultural centrality of music, it becomes important to examine whether admiration for music artists translates into tangible consumer behaviour—specifically, smartphone choice. While previous studies have explored celebrity endorsement in general consumer goods markets, limited empirical attention has focused on how specific endorsement attributes influence smartphone selection among undergraduates in Southeast Nigeria. This study therefore investigates the influence of music artist endorsement attributes—likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality—on smartphone choice among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. By examining these multidimensional constructs within a defined university population, the study contributes to both marketing communication scholarship and youth consumer behaviour research. It also provides practical insights for smartphone manufacturers and advertisers seeking to design endorsement strategies that resonate meaningfully with student markets.

Ultimately, understanding how symbolic figures shape technological consumption decisions offers a broader reflection on contemporary youth culture—where identity, media influence, and consumer choice intersect in powerful ways.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study

1. What relationship exists between the likeability of music artist endorsement and smartphone choice among undergraduates?
2. What effect does the credibility of music artist endorsement have on smartphone choice among undergraduates?
3. How does the physical attractiveness of music artist endorsement influence smartphone choice among undergraduates?
4. How does music artist endorsement personality affect smartphone choice among undergraduates?

Statement of the Problem

The smartphone market in Nigeria has become increasingly competitive, leading companies to rely heavily on music artist endorsements to attract young consumers. These endorsements are based on the assumption that admired artists can influence students' brand preferences and purchasing decisions. However, research shows that celebrity endorsement effectiveness depends on specific attributes such as credibility, attractiveness, and likeability rather than mere popularity (Erdogan, 1999; Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Although music artists are widely used in smartphone advertising in Nigeria, there is limited empirical evidence identifying which endorsement attributes actually influence smartphone choice among university students. Existing studies largely discuss celebrity endorsement generally without isolating measurable constructs such as likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality within the context of smartphone consumption.

Given the strong presence of music culture among undergraduates and the strategic use of music artists in brand promotions, it becomes necessary to determine whether and how these endorsement attributes shape smartphone selection. Therefore, this study addresses the need to empirically examine the influence of music artist endorsement attributes on smartphone choice among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Conceptual Review

Music Artist Endorsement

Music artist endorsement involves the strategic use of popular musicians to promote brands and influence consumer decision-making. Beyond entertainment, music artists serve as cultural influencers, shaping youth consumption patterns through their lifestyle, digital presence, and public image (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Among undergraduates, music artists function as aspirational figures; their endorsement of technology products, such as smartphones, enhances brand visibility, credibility, and emotional connection. Modern strategies rely on symbolic meaning transfer, where consumers internalise traits associated with the artist and extend them to the brand (Jin & Ryu, 2020; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). This makes music artist endorsement particularly relevant for understanding smartphone choice among young adults.

Likeability of Music Artist Endorsement

Likeability refers to the extent audiences perceive a music artist as pleasant, relatable, and emotionally appealing. Research shows that likeable endorsers generate positive affective responses, significantly improving brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Knoll & Matthes, 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Emotional attachment, often facilitated by parasocial relationships on social media, strengthens persuasion (Chung & Cho, 2020). Undergraduates who admire or feel connected to a music artist are more likely to

transfer those positive feelings to the endorsed smartphone, making likeability an affective pathway influencing choice.

Credibility of Music Artist Endorsement

Credibility involves perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity. Consumers assess whether an endorser genuinely aligns with a product before accepting persuasive messages (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2020). For high-involvement products like smartphones, credibility is critical, as students rely on perceived authenticity to evaluate quality and performance (Jin & Ryu, 2020). Endorsers perceived as knowledgeable or authentic increase the likelihood of influencing smartphone choice.

Physical Attractiveness of Music Artist Endorsement

Physical attractiveness refers to the visual appeal of the artist. In contemporary visual culture, particularly through Instagram, TikTok, and streaming platforms, appearance drives attention, recall, and engagement (Schouten et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Attractive endorsers enhance brand evaluations and interaction, elevating perceived brand prestige. For undergraduates, visual appeal is a peripheral cue that strengthens brand desirability and purchase intentions.

Personality of Music Artist Endorsement

Personality encompasses the distinctive traits, values, and public image of the artist. Congruence between endorser and brand personality enhances identification and loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021). Students may perceive smartphones endorsed by innovative, confident, or trend-setting artists as extensions of their identity, reinforcing preference and repeated purchase behaviour (Jin & Ryu, 2020)

Empirical Review

Recent studies demonstrate the strong influence of music artist endorsements on consumer behaviour, especially among youth. Dwivedi et al. (2021) found endorsements enhance brand engagement, self-brand connection, and purchase intention, particularly among undergraduates active on social media. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) highlighted that parasocial relationship; emotionally invested connections with celebrities—amplify endorsement effectiveness, with likeability, credibility, and attractiveness as key determinants.

Likeability has been shown to evoke positive emotions and enhance brand attitude. Chung and Cho (2020) reported that students favour products endorsed by relatable or admired artists. Credibility drives purchase intention for high-involvement products like smartphones. Jin and Ryu (2020) found authentic and consistent artists increase consumer trust and intention to buy, corroborated by Lou and Yuan (2020) in social media contexts.

Physical attractiveness captures attention and improves brand recall. Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2021) noted that visually appealing endorsers boost engagement and positive brand associations, while Schouten et al. (2020) highlighted its role in aspirational branding. Personality alignment enhances self-brand connection. Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasised that innovative, confident, or socially relevant traits reinforce identity expression and brand loyalty.

In Nigeria, artists such as Davido, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, and Burna Boy significantly impact smartphone brand awareness and student purchase decisions (Ifeanyichukwu, 2021; Nwosu & Okeke, 2022). Tecno, Infinix, and Samsung frequently leverage these artists to target undergraduates. Across

contexts, likeability, credibility, attractiveness, and personality collectively guide smartphone choice, validating the relevance of this marketing strategy among Nigerian undergraduates.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Meaning Transfer Theory (McCracken, 1989), which explains how celebrities influence consumer behaviour through the transfer of symbolic meanings. Celebrities acquire traits such as credibility, likeability, personality, and attractiveness, which are recognised by audiences. When a celebrity endorses a product, these meanings transfer to the product, shaping consumer perceptions. Consumers then adopt the product not only for functional value but also for the symbolic meanings it conveys, expressing identity, status, or lifestyle.

The theory is particularly relevant because smartphones serve as symbols of social identity among undergraduates. Music artists, as cultural icons, carry meanings that influence students' perceptions of smartphone brands. Credibility reinforces beliefs about product quality, while attractiveness, likeability, and personality enhance brand appeal. Unlike narrower frameworks like Source Credibility Theory, Meaning Transfer Theory accommodates emotional, symbolic, and identity-based motivations, offering a holistic explanation for endorsement effectiveness.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine how various music artist endorsement attributes influence smartphone choice among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection of students' perceptions and preferences, allowing trends and patterns to be summarised and interpreted (Akuezuilo & Agu, 2002). A quantitative approach was adopted to collect structured numerical data on students' attitudes towards the endorsement of smartphones by their favourite music artists, capturing dimensions such as likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality.

The study was conducted at the main campus of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Awka, selected due to its large student population and diversity of faculties, which makes findings generalisable across the university's undergraduate population. According to official records from the Director of MICTU, the total undergraduate population is 39,795 (UNIZIK, 2023).

A sample size of 400 undergraduate students was calculated using Taro Yamane's formula at a 5% margin of error, corresponding to a 95% confidence level. A multi-stage sampling technique ensured representative coverage: faculties were stratified to capture students across departments, genders, and age groups, while purposive sampling was applied to select students who were smartphone users and actively engaged with music content (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "*Music Artist Endorsement Attributes and Smartphone Choice among UNIZIK Undergraduate Students.*" The instrument consisted of 10 items measuring respondents' perceptions of endorsement attributes—likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality—and their impact on smartphone choice. Responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by two experts from the Faculty of Social Sciences at UNIZIK to ensure clarity, relevance, and consistency. A pilot test conducted with a small group of undergraduates yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, indicating good internal reliability (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Questionnaires were administered physically to ensure accurate completion and comprehension. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 384 were correctly completed and retrieved, yielding a 96% response rate.

Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean scores, to summarise demographic characteristics and respondents' perceptions of music artist endorsement attributes. A cut-off mean of 2.50 was adopted, with scores equal to or above 2.50 indicating agreement, while scores below 2.50 indicated disagreement. This methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of how likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality of music artists influence undergraduate students' smartphone choices at UNIZIK.

Results and Discussion

The study investigated the influence of music artist endorsement attributes on the choice of smartphones among undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The demographic profile of respondents revealed that females constituted the majority at 53.1%, while males were 46.9%. Most respondents fell within the age groups of 16–20 years (40.6%) and 21–25 years (39.1%), indicating a predominantly young adult population. Additionally, 68.75% of respondents identified as music fans, with Yo-Pop being the most preferred genre (46.4%). Correspondingly, 45.3% indicated that their favourite music artist was from the Yo-Pop genre, reflecting the dominance of contemporary popular music among undergraduates.

Recent studies demonstrate the strong influence of music artist endorsements on consumer behaviour, particularly among young consumers. Dwivedi et al. (2021) found that endorsements enhance brand engagement, self-brand connection, and purchase intention, especially among undergraduates who are active on social media platforms. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) highlighted that parasocial relationships—emotionally invested connections between audiences and celebrities—amplify endorsement effectiveness, identifying likeability, credibility, and attractiveness as key determinants of persuasion. These empirical insights provide a useful backdrop for interpreting the present findings within the framework of Meaning Transfer Theory (McCracken, 1989), which explains how celebrities transfer symbolic meanings to endorsed products, thereby shaping consumer perceptions and identity expression.

The analysis of likeability of music artist endorsement in this study indicated a clear relationship with smartphone choice. Respondents reported that they preferred smartphones endorsed by artists they perceived as friendly, kind, and whose branding conveyed quality and social prestige. Many agreed that traits such as warmth and approachability motivated them to select particular smartphone brands, while the perception that the artist was associated with high-calibre and respected individuals reinforced purchasing preference. The grand mean of 3.2 confirms that likeability is the most influential attribute. This aligns with Chung and Cho (2020), who reported that students favour products endorsed by relatable or admired artists, as such endorsements evoke positive emotions and strengthen brand attitudes. Within Meaning Transfer Theory, these findings suggest that the positive symbolic meanings attached to likeable artists are transferred to the smartphone brand, making it not only a functional device but also a representation of desirable social traits.

Regarding credibility, respondents considered the perceived reliability and trustworthiness of the artist as an important factor in smartphone selection. Many indicated that they associated their favourite artist's character with product quality, imagining the artist's integrity as reflective of the smartphone's credibility. The perception that the artist communicates a caring and trustworthy image influenced willingness to purchase endorsed products. The grand mean of 2.8 indicates that credibility is significant, though slightly less dominant than likeability. This finding corroborates Jin and Ryu (2020), who found that authentic and consistent artists increase consumer trust and purchase intention, particularly for high-

involvement products such as smartphones. Lou and Yuan (2020) similarly reported that credibility enhances persuasive effectiveness in social media contexts. From the perspective of Meaning Transfer Theory, credibility functions as a symbolic assurance; the trust vested in the artist becomes embedded in the brand, reducing perceived risk and reinforcing beliefs about product quality.

The physical attractiveness of music artists also influenced smartphone choice. Respondents indicated that aesthetically pleasing features—such as confident appearance, expressive facial features, and overall grooming—positively motivated their purchase decisions. Many agreed that seeing images of their favourite artist on smartphone branding increased product appeal and enhanced perceptions of durability and desirability. The grand mean of 2.9 demonstrates that attractiveness enhances endorsement effectiveness, though it operates alongside other attributes. This finding aligns with Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2021), who noted that visually appealing endorsers boost engagement and positive brand associations, and Schouten et al. (2020), who emphasized the role of attractiveness in aspirational branding. Within Meaning Transfer Theory, attractiveness transfers aspirational and lifestyle meanings to the smartphone, allowing students to symbolically align themselves with admired beauty standards and contemporary youth culture.

Personality also played a significant role in shaping smartphone choice. Respondents reported that traits such as high self-esteem, approachability, confidence, and alignment with their personal values motivated repeat purchases and influenced peer recommendations. Some indicated that they selected smartphones endorsed by artists whose personality resonated with their own, viewing the purchase as a form of social identification. The grand mean of 2.9 confirms that personality is a relevant determinant of purchasing behaviour. This finding supports Dwivedi et al. (2021), who emphasized that innovative, confident, and socially relevant traits in endorsers strengthen self-brand connection and reinforce identity expression. Meaning Transfer Theory explains this as a symbolic exchange process in which consumers internalize the personality traits associated with the celebrity through product adoption, using the smartphone as a medium for expressing identity and social belonging.

In the Nigerian context, the findings are further reinforced by evidence that artists such as Davido, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, and Burna Boy significantly influence smartphone brand awareness and student purchase decisions (Ifeanyichukwu, 2021; Nwosu & Okeke, 2022). Brands such as Tecno, Infinix, and Samsung strategically leverage these artists to appeal to undergraduate markets. This pattern supports the broader conclusion that across contexts, likeability, credibility, attractiveness, and personality collectively guide smartphone choice, validating the relevance of celebrity endorsement as a marketing strategy among Nigerian undergraduates.

In summary, the findings show that all four attributes of music artist endorsement positively influence smartphone choice among UNIZIK undergraduate students. Likeability emerged as the most influential factor, followed by physical attractiveness and personality, while credibility, though significant, had a slightly lower impact. These results align with Ajayi and Adeola (2021) and Uche and Nwosu (2022), who emphasized the role of celebrity endorsements in enhancing brand preference and consumer engagement among Nigerian youths. Overall, the study confirms the applicability of Meaning Transfer Theory by demonstrating that students do not merely purchase smartphones for their technological features; rather, they adopt them as symbolic extensions of the admired traits, lifestyles, and identities embodied by their favourite music artists. Consequently, smartphone companies targeting this demographic should not focus solely on functional specifications but strategically align their brands with artists whose symbolic meanings resonate deeply with the emotional, social, and identity-based aspirations of undergraduate consumers.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of music artist endorsement attributes on smartphone choice among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The findings indicate that likeability, credibility, physical attractiveness, and personality of music artists significantly shape students' smartphone purchasing decisions. Among these attributes, likeability emerged as the most influential factor, highlighting the importance of artists' friendliness, kindness, and perceived quality in shaping consumer preferences. Physical attractiveness and personality were also strong motivators, demonstrating that visual appeal and personal identification with the artist reinforce brand loyalty. Credibility, while impactful, had a slightly lower effect, suggesting that students may prioritise emotional connection and perceived relatability over the technical trustworthiness of the endorser. Overall, the study confirms that music artist endorsement is an effective marketing strategy in influencing the choice of smartphones among young consumers in the Nigerian university context.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strategic Selection of Endorsers: Smartphone companies should partner with music artists who are not only popular but also possess attributes of friendliness, relatability, and positive personality traits to maximise consumer engagement.
2. Focus on Visual and Emotional Appeal: Endorsement campaigns should highlight the physical attractiveness and charismatic personality of music artists, as these factors strongly influence students' purchasing decisions.
3. Enhancing Credibility: While emotional appeal drives initial interest, companies should also reinforce the credibility of both the artist and the product through consistent quality assurance and transparent communication.
4. Targeted Marketing for Youth Demographics: Marketing strategies should align with youth preferences for popular music genres and artists, ensuring that endorsements resonate with the lifestyle and values of the undergraduate market.
5. Integrated Branding Strategies: Companies should combine celebrity endorsements with other branding strategies such as digital engagement, social media campaigns, and experiential marketing to strengthen overall brand loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour.

In conclusion, leveraging music artist endorsement remains a viable and impactful approach for smartphone marketers aiming to influence the preferences of young consumers in Nigerian universities. By carefully selecting endorsers who align with the emotional, aesthetic, and personal values of students, companies can achieve greater brand visibility, acceptance, and sustained consumer loyalty.

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