

EFFECT OF BRAND AMBASSADOR ON CONSUMER BUYING DECISION OF 9MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES IN FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, NIGERIA

¹TERAB, Abdulrahman Abba & ²OGAJI Salim Muhammad

¹Department of Business Administration, Nasarawa State University, Keffi – Nigeria

²Department of Business Administration, Federal University of Kashere-Nigeria

ibnogaji@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of brand ambassador credibility and visibility on consumer buying decision of 9mobile telecommunication services in F.C.T., Abuja. The study adopted descriptive research design whereby questionnaires were administered to a sample of three hundred and fifty (350) respondents. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the two (2) hypotheses formulated. The study found that visibility and credibility have positive and significant effect on consumer buying decisions of 9Mobile telecom services. The study recommends based on the findings that 9Mobile should leverage social media by encouraging ambassadors to use branded hashtags, promote content, and host takeovers or giveaways while encouraging their ambassadors to collaborate with other influencers to expand reach, engage directly with their audiences through comments while gifting customized products. Also, it is recommended that 9Mobile should focus more on authenticity by selecting ambassadors who genuinely align with your brand values and products, ensuring their audience trusts their endorsement. Additionally, brand ambassadors should be provided with adequate knowledge and information about the products, so they can answer questions knowledgeably and confidently.

Keywords: Credibility, Visibility, Consumer Buying Decision.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers today are more selective, influenced by a blend of personal preferences, cultural nuances, global trends, and technological advancements. The globalization of information and economies has expanded product choices and cross-cultural influences, reshaping purchasing decisions (Venter et al., 2019). According to Prihandono et al. (2020), understanding these complex interactions, as well as the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics at play, is essential for businesses to effectively address the needs of both global and local markets. Researchers and firms must develop strategies that cater to diverse consumer preferences in an increasingly interconnected world.

The Nigerian consumer landscape is influenced by traditional values, socio-economic conditions, and the growing role of technology, requiring businesses to adapt strategies that bridge traditional preferences and modern trends. According to Chetioui et al. (2020), a number of factors influence customer purchasing decisions; consequently, it is essential to investigate these elements in order to comprehend how they affect decisions. As opined by Bu et al. (2022), influencer marketing/brand ambassadorship is related to consumer decisions. Brand ambassadors play a significant role in shaping consumer decisions by enhancing brand appeal and trust, as highlighted by studies linking influencer marketing to purchasing behavior (Faradasya & Trianasari, 2021). Effective use of brand ambassadors involves leveraging their attractiveness, expertise, and credibility to transfer positive attributes to products, thus improving brand image and driving sales. However, selecting the right celebrity endorser is crucial, as their impact on branding can be both beneficial and risky, necessitating careful strategic planning.

In the fiercely competitive Nigerian telecom market, businesses such as 9mobile use brand ambassadors as a primary marketing tactic to sway customer attitudes and preferences. There is a serious knowledge vacuum because, despite large investments, the impact of these endorsements on purchasing decisions is still unclear due to a lack of empirical data. Optimizing marketing efforts requires an understanding of this impact, particularly in the digital age when social media significantly influences consumer behavior. Determining whether brand ambassadors can successfully stand out and encourage purchases is

becoming more and more crucial for preserving a competitive edge as consumers are inundated with marketing messages.

The study centered on evaluating the effect of brand ambassador visibility and credibility on consumer buying decision of 9mobile telecommunication services in F.C.T., Abuja. The following hypotheses stated in null form guided the study:

H₀₁: Visibility has no significant effect on consumer buying decision of 9mobile telecommunication services in F.C.T., Abuja.

H₀₂: Credibility has no significant effect on consumer buying decision of 9mobile telecommunication services in F.C.T., Abuja.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Buying Decision

Although decision-making is an individual action that is directly tied to obtaining and consuming the things given, consumers consider a number of aspects before making a purchase (Hertati & Safkaur, 2020). The process of substituting the benefits and values that customers obtain influences their purchasing decisions (Wang & Tsai, 2014). Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) described a purchase decision as the steps that consumers take to find, accept, utilize, assess, and pay for goods and services that are intended to meet their needs. Kotler and Armstrong (2014) define purchasing decisions as the acts that consumers conduct after they are certain they wish to purchase a good or service. This study posits consumer buying decision as the result of the consideration they give to whether or not to buy a good or service.

Visibility

According to Setiawan (2018), visibility is defined as the ability of a person with adequate character traits to attract and maintain the audience's attention. In general, endorsers who are well-known and have significant influence within the community are selected to promote brands. This strategy ensures that the public's attention is effectively directed towards the advertised brand, leveraging the endorser's popularity and influence to enhance the brand's visibility and appeal. Amitay et al. (2020) assert that visibility pertains to the popularity of an endorser and the frequency with which they appear in public. Chinmi et al. (2020) provide yet another viewpoint, defining visibility as the extent to which an influencer is known and appreciated by the public. Their position underscores not only the recognition of the influencer but also the level of appreciation they receive from their audience. This study adopts the definition of Setiawan (2018).

Credibility

Amitay et. al (2020) assert that credibility of a celebrity includes two things, namely the expertise and objectivity. Celebrity's knowledge of a product is closely related to his or her expertise, while objectivity refers to the ability to give a product customer's trust. In another opinion, Yoon and Kim (2015) aver that credibility of a brand ambassador is perceived as expertise without being objective, and vice versa. Expertise is relevant to informational communication models, both low and high involvement because perceived expertise enhances attention to and learning of (low involvement) or acceptance of (high involvement) information presented in support of brand attitude. Objectivity, on the other hand, is mainly relevant to the high involvement/informational model. The position by Amitay et. al (2020) is adopted for this study.

Visibility and Consumer Buying Decision

Iq'maliyah and Franciscus (2024) investigated the effect of visibility and brand image on consumer purchase decision. The method used in the research is a quantitative method and the sampling technique used in the study was purposive sampling. The population were consumers who had bought Scarlett products at Bhayangkara University, Greater Jakarta. The number of samples used were 100 respondents. Data was collected via questionnaire and analysis was done using linear regression technique with the aid of SPSS software. Based on the research results, visibility has a positive effect on consumer purchase

decision while the effect of brand image was found to be insignificant. The study solely focused on Scarlett products in Bhayangkara University, Greater Jakarta which limits its findings from general applicability to other products/services in a different country/region.

In another research carried out by Harbyanto and Sulaeman (2024), Nike brand users were sampled to determine the impact of the brand ambassador's visibility on brand image and the purchase decision towards Nike brand shoes in the city of Mataram. The study was exploratory. The population were Mataram city residents aged > 18 years who have purchased Nike brand sports shoes before, and chose to buy their own Nike shoes. 100 respondents were sampled purposively. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Analysis was done using Partial Least Square (PLS) strategy via the smartPLS 3.0 software. The research results showed that brand ambassadors' visibility have a significant influence on brand image; brand ambassadors have a significant influence on purchasing decisions; and brand image has a significant effect on purchasing decisions. The sample size for the study is too small to represent a larger population. Additionally, its outcome cannot be applicable to 9mobile users as it was conducted on Nike brand sports shoes.

Nuryanti et al. (2023) determined the effect of celebrity endorsers' visibility on consumer buying decisions using the Ruangguru application. The type of research conducted was quantitative research. The population in were all students of SMA Negeri 15 Jakarta, namely 636 students for the 2021/2022 academic year. Sample size used in the study was 86 respondents. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire, documentation and literature review. The sampling technique used was the purposive sampling method. The data analysis technique used in the research was simple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that there is no positive influence between celebrity endorsers' visibility and purchasing decisions. The study nonetheless used a very small sample size which makes its findings less robust.

Credibility and Consumer Buying Decision

Raja and Shahrel (2024) used a preliminary method to ascertain the authenticity of marketing endorsers on the TikTok platform who impact consumers' purchase decisions. It offered an integrated VisCAP Model that considers the availability of advertising functions, such attraction, credibility, and competence, that endorsers value and that can affect customers' buying decisions. In order to investigate stimulation from various angles that have previously been investigated by academics that described an influencer capable of capturing customers' attention from the standpoint of their purchase decision, the study looked at previous research from the internet, journals, and publications on the said topic. The study came to the conclusion that customers may be persuaded to purchase a product by the reputation of a brand ambassador or endorser. However, the study only used data from earlier research, which is weak because those studies were conducted in many locations and cannot be precisely replicated to others.

Similarly, Sari et al. (2023) investigated the impact of a brand ambassador's credibility on purchase decisions and ascertained whether there was a relationship between gift-giving and purchase decisions by utilizing the multiple linear regression technique of analysis to assess the data collected. The study is quantitative in nature, and the primary data used were those collected from respondents' questionnaires. Customers who have purchased Lemonilo X NCT Dream Noodles, are aware of NCT Dream, and have won prizes from the product's packaging were the subjects of the study. A sample of forty respondents was obtained using the purposive sampling technique. The findings demonstrated that gift-giving was significantly correlated with the purchasing decision variable, as was the brand ambassador credibility variable. Nevertheless, the study's sample size is too small to yield a reliable result and adequately represent a wider consumer base.

Ansir (2023) used an Instagram user survey targeted at the Makassar region to examine the impact of brand image and believability on purchase decisions. The traditional assumption test and numerous regression equations were the data analysis techniques used. Thirty Instagram users from the Makassar

Region made up the sample. In accordance with the goals of the study, questionnaires, literature reviews, and in-person interviews with relevant parties were used to collect the research data. Simple linear regression was used for analysis. According to the study's findings, Instagram users in the Makassar region are significantly influenced in part by their brand image and the credibility of brand ambassadors when making purchases. However, the study's findings cannot be generally applicable due to geographical limitation.

Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory (SIT), developed by Kelman (1953) in the 1950s, examines how social influence leads to attitude or behavior changes. It draws on foundational research in conformity and social dynamics (Asch, 1961), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), and functional attitudes (Katz, 1960). Kelman (1974) proposed that attitudes are shaped by social conventions, norms, and personal predispositions, with the acceptance of social influence influenced by power dynamics, the characteristics of the influencer, and the communicated message. SIT highlights that social influence operates differently across individuals, depending on the social and psychological context.

Kelman (1958) identified three modes of social influence acceptance: compliance, identification, and internalization. These modes reflect different responses to social influence, shaped by interactions with influencing agents in informational and motivational contexts. SIT outlines a three-step process defining the situation, presenting the influencer, and specifying the response that determines the effectiveness of influence. Responses such as exposure, positive orientation, and induced behavior pave the way for influence acceptance, illustrating the nuanced dynamics of social interaction.

Over time, SIT has been applied to fields such as marketing and information systems (Cheung et al., 2022), offering insights into consumer behavior and interpersonal communication (Binyamin, 2020). However, the theory has faced criticism for its limited consideration of contextual factors, power dynamics, and the intentionality behind influences (Wang et al., 2022). Researchers have called for more exploration of situational differences and their impact on social influence, arguing that SIT needs refinement to address these complexities and enhance its applicability across diverse scenarios. To that end, some critics argued that Kelman's theory may not be adequate to address the role of situational factors in social influence processes (Dong et al., 2021). This study adopted the Social Influence Theory because it provides a robust explanation for how others (brand ambassadors in this case) affect behavior, offering insights into the mechanisms of social conformity, peer pressure, and the impact of influential figures. Its applicability to various real-life situations, particularly in consumer behavior, makes it a valuable framework for understanding and leveraging social influence in marketing strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the nature of relationship between consumer buying decisions (dependent variable) and visibility and credibility (independent variables). In this study, the target population comprised of 9mobile users. The Cochran sample size determination formula which calculates sample size for an infinite population was used to obtain the sample size for the study. The formula is presented below:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

where:

e = the desired level of precision (margin of error = 5%)

p = estimated proportion of the population which has the attribute in question (assuming 0.65)

q = 1-p (1-0.65 = 0.35)

Z = z-value (found in the Z table = 1.96 at 95% confidence level)

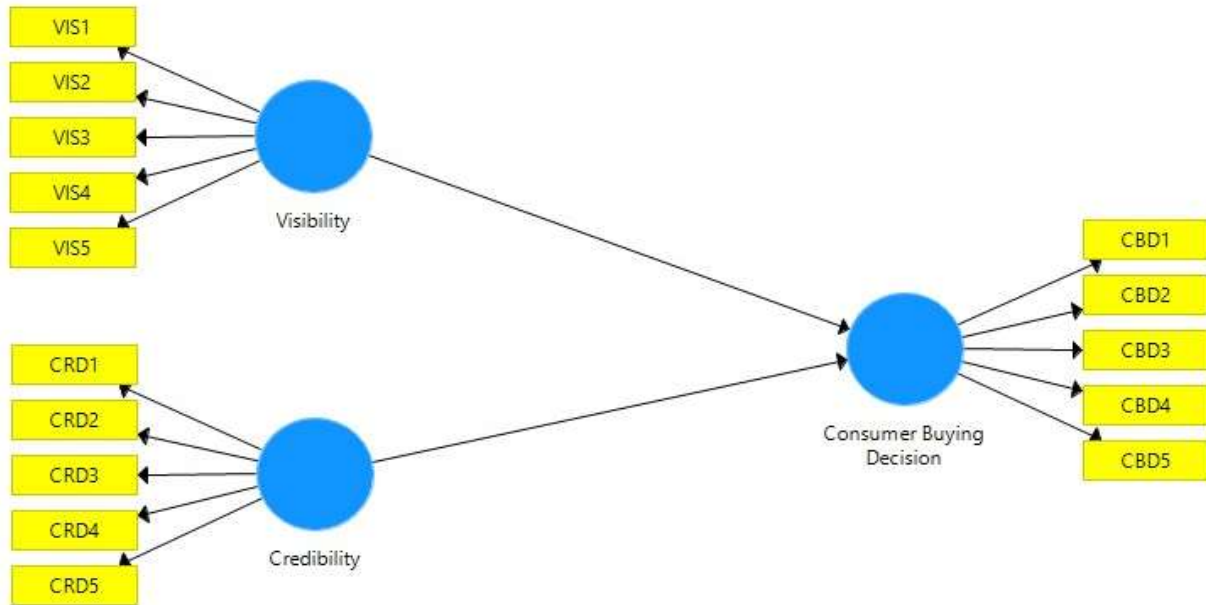
$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.65) (0.35)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(3.84) (0.65) (0.35)}{0.05^2}$$

n = 350

Hence, the sample size for this study was 350. The 350 sample was selected based on the criteria that the respondent has purchased/used or still buys/uses 9mobile telecommunication services. Primary source of data was explored in getting important and useful information for the study. The data was gathered from respondents through questionnaire instrument structured on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire used for this study was adapted from previous studies of Putri and Agus (2023), Asty et al. (2019) and Wahyoedi et al. (2022). The data collected was analyzed using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-AEM) with the aid of SmartPLS software on responses from the data collected through the administered questionnaire to 9mobile users in F.C.T.

Fig. 1: Structural Model



Source: Researcher's computation, (2024) via SmartPLS

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the four hundred and thirty-eight (438) distributed questionnaires, 401 were properly filled and returned giving a response rate of 91%. Subsequently, all further analyses were done using 401 responses data.

Assessment of Measurement Model

In assessing the measurement model, the researcher began by assessing the item outer loadings. As a rule, loadings above 0.708 are recommended, as they indicate that the construct explains more than 50 percent of the indicator's variance, thus providing acceptable item reliability (Hair, et al., 2019). However, Hair, et al., (2019) posited that low but significant indicator loading of 0.50 can be included hence justifying why indicators with loadings less than 0.708 and above 0.50 were not deleted from the model as seen in figure 2 below.

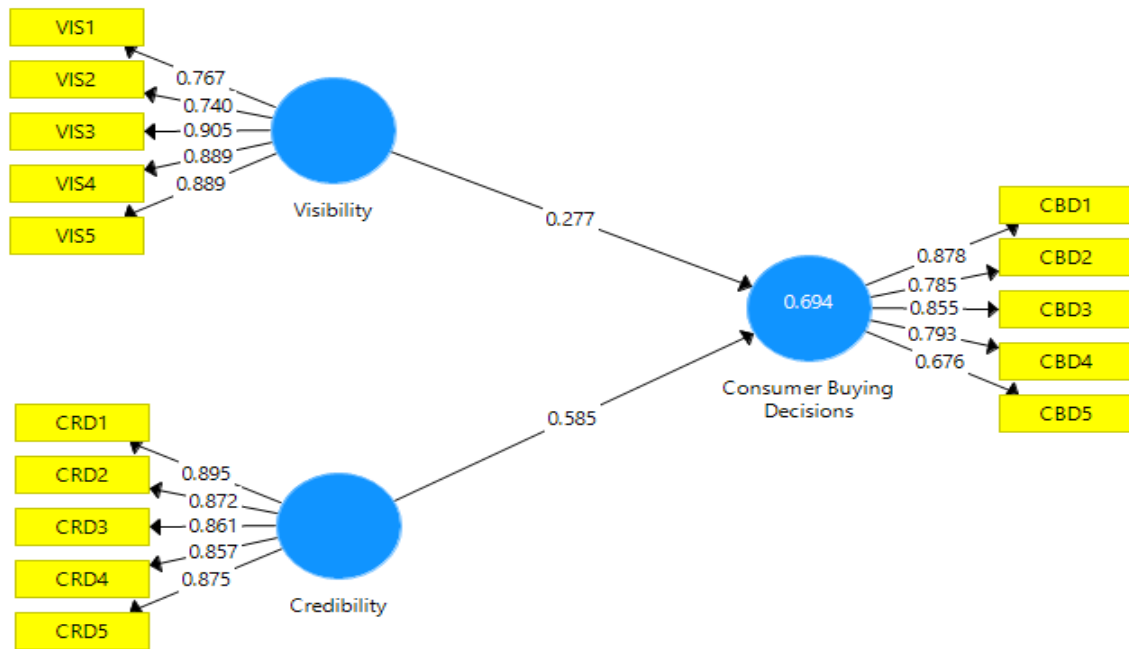


Fig 2: Indicator Loadings.

Table 4.2: Reliability of study scale

S/N	Variables		Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	No of Items
1	Visibility (VIS)	VIS1	0.767	0.894	0.923	0.707	5
		VIS2	0.740				
		VIS3	0.905				
		VIS4	0.889				
		VIS5	0.889				
2	Credibility (CRD)	CRD1	0.895	0.921	0.941	0.760	5
		CRD2	0.872				
		CRD3	0.861				
		CRD4	0.857				
		CRD5	0.875				
3	Consumer Buying Decision (CBD)	CBD1	0.878	0.860	0.899	0.641	5
		CBD2	0.785				
		CBD3	0.855				
		CBD4	0.793				
		CBD5	0.676				

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024

Composite reliability of Jöreskog's (1971) was applied to test for internal consistency of the study. All the values fall within the Hair et al. (2019) rating of good consistency. The Cronbach alpha value were above 0.60 which is the minimum threshold as recommended by Sekaran (2010). To test for the convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was used. All the latent variables showed values greater than 0.50 which indicates that the constructs explain at least 50 percent of the variance of its items. According to Henseler, et al., (2015) the Fornell-Larcker criterion does not perform well when explaining discriminant validity, particularly when the indicator loadings on a construct differ only slightly. As a replacement, they proposed the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations which is the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the (geometric) mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct (Voorhees et al., 2016). Discriminant

validity problems are present when HTMT values are high than 0.90 for structural models (Henseler, et al., 2015).

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	VIS	CRD	CBD
VIS	1.000		
CRD	0.233	1.000	
CBD	0.522	0.218	1.000

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to evaluate collinearity of the formative indicators. All the VIF values were less than 5 indicate the absence of critical collinearity issues among the indicators of formatively measured constructs (Hair, et al., 2019).

Model Goodness of Fit (GoF)

Sequel to the need to validate the PLS model, there is a need to assess the goodness of fit of the model as Hair, et al. (2017) suggested. This study used the standardised root mean square residual's (SRMR). The choice of this index was based on the fact that the SRMR provides the absolute fit measure where a value of zero indicates a perfect fit. The study adopted Hu & Bentler (1998) suggestion that a value of less than 0.08 represents a good fit while applying SRMR for model goodness of fit. The study result indicates an SRMR value of 0.078. This indicates the model is fit.

Assessing the Structural Model

Having satisfied the measurement model assessment, the next step in evaluating PLS-SEM results is to assess the structural model. Standard assessment criteria, which was considered include the path coefficient, t-values, p-values and coefficient of determination (R^2). The bootstrapping procedure was conducted using a resample of 5000.

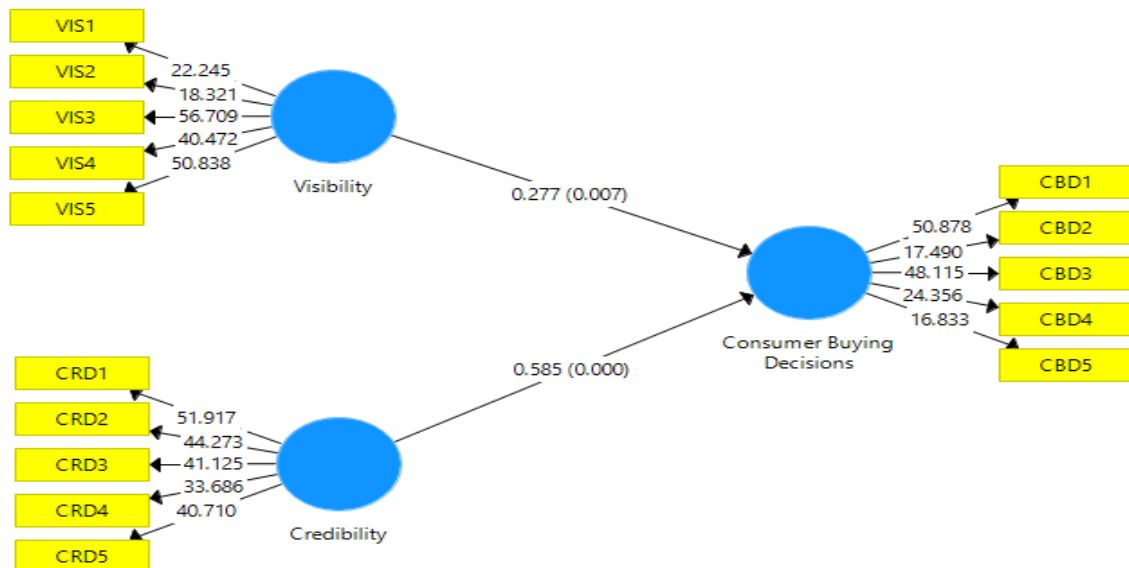


Fig. 3: Path Coefficients of the Regression Model.

R Square Table

	R^2	Q^2
Consumer Buying Decision	0.694	0.679

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024

The R-square value stood at 0.694 indicating that brand ambassador proxied by visibility and credibility account for 69.4% variation in consumer buying decisions. The remaining 30.6% variation could be explained by other factors not included in the study. Based on Hair, et al., (2019), the r-square is considered moderate. The result of the path analysis is presented in the table below:

Table 4.4: Path Coefficients

Hypotheses	Variable	B	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
Ho ₁	Visibility -> Consumer Buying Decision	0.277	2.710	0.007	Rejected
Ho ₂	Credibility -> Consumer Buying Decision	0.585	5.938	0.000	Rejected

Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024

The result from the analysis indicates that brand ambassador visibility has positive and significant effect on consumer buying decision of 9Mobile telecommunication services in FCT. The decision was reached based on the t-value of 2.710 which is greater than 1.964 and a beta value of 0.277 with a p-value of 0.007. This finding implies that ambassadors employed by 9Mobile have a good level of popularity capable of engineering buying decision in the target audience. This finding is in agreement with that of Iq'maliyah and Franciscus (2024) and Harbyanto and Sulaeman (2024) who found positive and significant effect of visibility on buying decision. However, it disagrees with the finding of Nuryanti et al. (2023) who found negative effect of visibility on consumer buying decision.

The result from the analysis indicates that brand ambassador credibility has positive and significant effect on consumer buying decision of 9Mobile telecommunication services in FCT. The decision was reached based on the t-value of 5.938 which is greater than 1.964 and a beta value of 0.585 with a p-value of 0.000. This finding implies that ambassadors employed by 9Mobile have a reasonable level of knowledge about their product and have the ability to give a product customer's trust. This finding is in agreement with that of Ansir (2023) Sari et al. (2023) Raja and Shahrel (2024) who found significant effect of credibility on purchase decision.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the brand amabassador influences buying decisions among customers towards a brand. Specifically, an ambassador's popularity and ability to create products/brand's trust in the minds of customers is highly imperative. Therefore, based on the study's findings, it is recommended that:

- i. 9Mobile should leverage social media by encouraging ambassadors to use branded hashtags, promote content, and host takeovers or giveaways. They should create high-quality content such as tutorials, user-generated content among others. Brand ambassadors should be encouraged to collaborate with other influencers to expand reach, engage directly with their audiences through comments while gifting customized products.
- ii. Also, it is recommended that 9Mobile should focus more on authenticity by selecting ambassadors who genuinely align with your brand values and products, ensuring their audience trusts their endorsement. Ambassadors should be encouraged to share personal experiences about the brand they are promoting as this will create a more relatable and honest connection. Additionally, brand ambassadors should be provided with adequate knowledge and information about the products, so they can answer questions knowledgeably and confidently.

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APPENDIX: Research Questionnaire

Keywords: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

Total gotten: ***

S/N	Visibility (VIS)	SA	A	N	D	SD
VIS1	Advertisements made by a brand ambassador enhances the brand's visibility.					
VIS2	9mobile brand ambassador appears frequently in public and social media.					
VIS3	The brand ambassador is well known and popular.					
VIS4	The brand ambassador is often associated with 9mobile.					
VIS5	The brand ambassador is easily recognizable.					
	Credibility (CRD)					
CRD1	The brand ambassador seems knowledgeable about the services provided by the brand.					
CRD2	The brand ambassador has a good reputation.					
CRD3	The brand ambassador's opinions about the brand are credible.					
CRD4	The brand ambassador is reliable & honest about the services they advertise.					
CRD5	The brand ambassador's endorsements are believable.					
	Consumer Buying Decision (CBD)					
CBD1	I am more likely to repurchase from the brand due to the brand ambassador.					
CBD2	The brand ambassador's association with the brand motivates me to choose it over competitors.					
CBD3	The brand ambassador's endorsements increase my knowledge of the brand's offerings.					
CBD4	I trust products/services more when they are promoted by the brand ambassador.					
CBD5	I consider products endorsed by the brand ambassador to be superior to non-endorsed products.					