Research Paper

Brand Revitalization of the Declining Mobile Phone Brand via Brand Ambassadors and Product Innovation.

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ABSTRACT

While Nokia led the industry for quite a long, its decline stage is alarming. Catering to the need to revitalize the brand, the study aims to develop a rebranding strategy for Nokia. In terms of scope, the study is correlational with quantitative methods being employed for hypothetical-deductive investigation. Results depict the significant impact of brand ambassadors and the positive relation of product innovation measures to revitalize the brand Nokia. The interlinkage of brand ambassadors' influence with a focus on product innovation strategies, especially for a declining mobile phone brand is a rare practice in academic research. The research is beneficial not only for the intended brand but also for brands in similar businesses facing such kinds of scenarios. The scope of the study can be huge by incorporating a Global audience, though limited in this study as far as sample region is concerned.

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1. INTRODUCTION

An introductory brand inching towards growth is always motivating, exactly how an established brand reaching decline is not desirable; especially when the brand has enjoyed huge loyalty over decades. Undoubtedly, an alarming situation for entrepreneurs, but equally a worrisome aspect for the customers and users. While it is obvious in the life cycle of many brands that decline becomes inevitable after maturity (Cao & Folan, 2012), some brands keep innovating themselves whereas many fail to keep up with new trends (Komninos, 2002). As stated, brands come and go but seeing a brand being worshiped and then vanishing in no time turns out disastrous for its fans/ users even, and this is what exactly happened to NOKIA.

Nokia was a brand with a famous slogan i.e., connecting people, with a famous ring tone, having a famous game in it i.e., the snake which is now updated with the title Snake Xenzia. The other notable features of Nokia's recognition encompassed long-lasting battery time, and the famous N-Series (Borhanuddin & Iqbal, 2016). There was every reason that having or keeping a Nokia for Gen X and Gen Y was a moment of pride – a status that the Apple I –phone may be enjoying currently, though Nokia with its 3210 series, was equally cherished by medium-income groups as well. As the Finnish brand started losing market share, its causes and factors are still being discussed. However, according to Rusko (2012) not getting agile with Android tech is something that will make Nokia feel like missing the boat, missing the opportunity, and missing the glory for generations to come.

As discussed above, what happened is a thing of the past and decline is common in product life cycles, though what can still be done to regain its status is the concern of this study. Literature is full of theories encompassing product development, product modifications, and innovations to revitalize the brand (Dangelico, 2016). Nokia is also found to be doing quite a few of them but why hasn't it been successful and what exactly and precisely can be done to at least make its presence feel in the market is the problem at hand. As per Kahn, Castellion, and Griffin (2013), continuous product development is the lifeblood of dying brands, Latif, Islam, and Noor (2014)

have stressed the need for marketing strategies for increased brand awareness. Also, Kolbl, Konecnik Ruzzier, and Kolar (2015) have discussed the use of brand revitalization and brand reinforcement strategies in detail, the practical implication and establishing effective marketing campaigns in tandem with product innovation is something yet to be practiced on a bigger scale. Although HMD Global OY is responsible for marketing brand Nokia's phones, the original Nokia company has transformed into software development and provisions of IT solutions. Considering this transition and Nokia's established name, the objectives of the research encompass:

- To overview the role of Celebrity on consumer choice;
- To analyze the impact of product innovation in smartphone categories;
- To suggest marketing strategies for brand revitalization and brand reinforcement of the brand under observation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand ambassadors

Brand Ambassadors are termed as instruments that increase sales by communicating with the target audience (Lea-Greenwood, 2012). While MacInnis, Rao, and Weiss (2002) believe that ad content is mainly focused on communication by brand ambassadors, Yoo and Jin (2013) link the positive relation of a brand ambassador's image to the company's image. It can further be implied that the greater the credibility is the celebrity promoting the brand, the higher the seriousness of brand communication is perceived by its target audience. This is explained as "Congruence" in theory. As per Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg (2001), the conformance between a celebrity's image and brand attributes is the main criterion for choosing a brand ambassador. It will be interesting to analyze the ways this congruence can be applied to Nokia's revival and its probable effect on consumer choice as the research proceeds. The Attractiveness of the Brand Ambassador i.e., Physical or non-physical is another aspect that aids the brand to communicate its message effectively to the respective audience (Singh, 2017).

2.2 Product innovation

Product innovation is a key aspect in bridging the gap between existing and futuristic consumer demand (Un, Cuervo-Cazurra, & Asakawa, 2010). The changing trends in fashion and buying behavior may account for continuous innovation (Cooper & Edgett, 2008). This innovation may be termed as a modification or could be an outcome of the user interface as well. Companies tend

to attain a competitive advantage based on this product innovation (W.-C. Wang, Lin, & Chu, 2011). Another way to look at product innovation could be customization i.e. tailoring the product as per individual customer's needs (Pallant, Sands, & Karpen, 2020). The customization may mainly include design, colors, and user interface (Jussani, Vasconcellos, & Wright, 2018). Earlier small firms were easily approachable for making the desired customization, but over the years bigger brands have been doing it at the mass level, so the concept of Mass customization has taken the lead. Nike Japan is one such huge company that is providing its customers the option of mass customization by making required changes in shoes' colors to apparel (Pollard, Chuo, & Lee, 2008). This aspect of Nike customization's practices is a motivating factor for other bigger brands, entailing ways and possibilities to opt for customization in their respective domains. Companies like Nokia, which are struggling to regain their lost market share might try customization practices to stay relevant in the business.

2.3 Purchase intention

Purchase intention reveals a customer's future purchase pattern (Wu, Yeh, & Hsiao, 2011). Companies making efforts via advertisements is one way to initiate customers' thought process to buy the product (Chen, Hsu, & Lin, 2010). Other ways to instigate purchase intention include the market offering that further incorporates discounts and value-added features (Kim & Ko, 2010). As per Shen (2015), in addition to mobile/ online shopping becoming a trend, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control affect customer's purchase intention. While customers use various mobile apps for their shopping, there can be a chance for declining mobile phones to incorporate respective apps that reflect customers' liking. So, as the research proceeds this idea can find its dimensions to the next level. The above literature encompassing Brand Ambassadors, Product Innovation, and Purchase Intention leads to the proposition of the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand Ambassadors (BA) have a significant impact on purchase intention (PI);

H2: Product Development (PD) has a positive relation with purchase intention (PI).

Further, presented below is the table mentioning some of the notable recent studies encompassing the connection between Brand Ambassadors, Product Development, and Purchase Intention.

Table 1. BA & PD affecting Purchase Intention

AUTHOR	FINDINGS
(Clara, 2023)	Consumers are more likely to purchase products endorsed by ambassadors thus contributing to brand love
(Prasetio & Purnamawati, 2023)	Brand Ambassadors and electronic word of mouth influence purchase decision.
(Fuadi, Yulius, & Pangaribuan, 2023)	Korean Brand Ambassadors, Price and Product Quality aid in shaping purchase intention.
(Safika & Raflah, 2021)	Brand Image, Brand ambassadors and Price have impact on purchase intention
(Argyris, **Muqaddam**, & Miller, 2021)	Visual presentation of influencer's credibility has an impact on purchase intention
(Nofiawaty, Fitrianto, & Iisnawati, 2020)	Ambassadors' credibility in E markets is vital for purchase intention
(Sokolova & Kefi, 2020)	Influencer marketing with brand ambassadors leads to higher purchase intention.
(Osei-Frimpong, Donkor, & Owusu-Frimpong, 2019)	Celebrity endorsement lead to increased purchase intention in Emerging Markets.
(**Mudzakir**, 2018)	Influencer Image contribute to Brand image and further impacting Purchase intention
(F. Wang & Hariandja, 2016)	Positive relationship found between brand ambassadors campaigns and purchase intention

As evident from table 1 above, the findings depict a positive relation between brand ambassadors' influence and purchase intention. The same is true for product development suggesting the need for continuous product improvements. However, adding the dimension of a declining mobile phone brand and aiding in the cause of brand revitalization not only emphasizes the research gap at hand but also contributes to a novel research aspect where researchers can incorporate further studies leading to product innovation.

2.4 Product life cycle

Developed in the 1950s by Raymond Vernon (Cox, 1967) and still relevant in marketing literature, the application of the Product Life Cycle is a guiding principle for constant innovation. The four stages i.e., Introduction, growth, maturity, and decline can be applied to various brands and necessary strategies can be implemented accordingly (Kotler, 1965). To analyze PLC (Product

Life Cycle) in the case of Nokia, it is important to mention how it made an impact in its introductory stage. It came up with the Nokia Mobira Cityman 900 in 1987 (Karila, 2017), a phone that promised better signal strength and was one of a kind (Rusko, 2012). With constant innovation, the brand didn't look back and became a household name in other parts of the world up to the late 90s. In most cases, the brand started making its presence felt in low economic regions worldwide, it was aggressive marketing that aided the cause. The high-tech boom of the 2000s made things easy for Nokia and the brand promised to be the ultimate brand by 2010 and had the best of its maturity stage. It was exactly the time when Nokia could have nearly replaced the generic nature of mobile phones i.e., mobile phones mean Nokia, The post-2010 world witnessed a software named "android". As per Butler (2010) android phones started changing the mobile phone landscape, lack of making it to Android could have been considered a major reason for Nokia's downfall, and this is something where Nokia missed the trick. However, post-2010 efforts have been made to reenergize the brand with Nokia opting for Android phones, but the market captured by Apple and Samsun at the top while other Android phones in the second spot are leaving no room for Nokia but the last spots in the Android market. This is a dilemma with such an iconic brand effort that can still be done to increase Nokia's standing, which is one of the objectives of this study. The following conceptual framework is an attempt to overview if there still exists loyalty for Nokia or can the implication of unconventional marketing strategies and product innovation is a way forward for Nokia.

The above literature leads to the development of the following hypothesis as Fig 1 below:
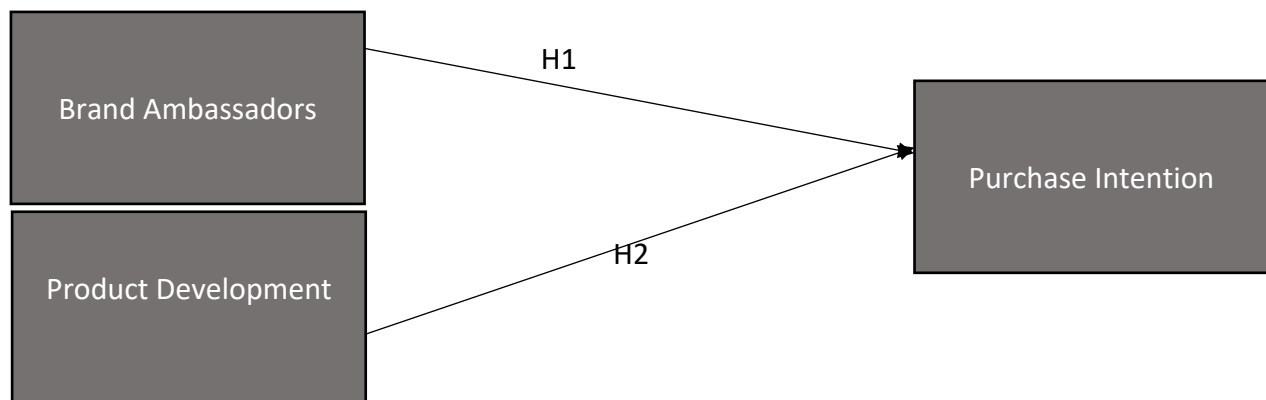

Fig 1. Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

The research is a hypothetical-deductive investigation considering the type of inference, based on a crossectional time frame i.e., the respondents were contacted only once from February 2023 to April 2023. The study follows the scientific applied approach employing statistical variables to understand consumer preferences about a specific brand, while explanatory as far as depth of scope is concerned i.e., cause and effect relationship for generalization of results for similar studies. According to the type of data used the study is quantitative as an online survey was deployed to respondents of various generations. (see Table 2). The reason for targeting various generations accounts for brand usage among earlier generations so respondents' view about the brand's persona is better identified. This will further aid in the comparison of brand choice and preference for value-added features among sample regions. For that matter, convenience sampling was employed justifying respondents having knowledge of Nokia as a past giant and now seen rarely as the brand of choice. The questionnaire was shared through online (Google) Forms which was based on relevant literature comprising the role of Brand ambassadors, Product Innovation, and purchase intention, while a few of the tailored questions were subjected to respective reliability and validity analysis. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey response rate was 65% and in total the sample of 140 was achieved.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Respondents demographics

The results of the demographics as per Table 2. show an even mix of gender, whereas half of the sample belongs to the Generation Z era, depicting that at least 50% of the respondents are well aware of Nokia's brand and have witnessed its peak. Therefore, their attachment and brand recall can better be analyzed for meaningful results. Further seeing users' status, it is alarming to find less than 1% of Nokia buyers, clearly reflecting the brand's decline in the sample region, while making competition irrelevant with acclaimed brands. Even these minor findings demand the application of a comprehensive brand revitalization strategy, which is the essence of this study.

Table 2. Demographics

Gender		Birth Decade		Mobile phone Users	
Males	52%	1970s	2.9%	Apple	46.4%
Females	48%	1980s	10.7%	Samsung	31.2%
		1990s	36.4%	Nokia	0.7%
		2000s	50%	Others	21.7%

4.2 Reliability and validity

Table 3 depicts the reliability analysis. A value of greater than 0.7 Cronbach alpha ensures that respondents understood the items clearly (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 3. ReliabilityStatistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.754	14

Table 4 demonstrates KMO values. The cutoff KMO value i.e., > 0.6 corresponds to the sample data fit for further (factor) analysis.

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.683
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	540.707
	Df	66
	Sig.	.000

Table 5. Reveals the total variance explained for the model i.e., almost 60% for the prospective three factors. The score passes the threshold level of 60% for model fit. The score of almost 60% is determinantal considering the nature of applied research and questions at hand i.e., recording respondents' views about an outdated brand affecting their future purchases towards it.

Table 5. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings[a]
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	3.326	27.718	27.718	3.326	27.718	27.718	2.873
2	2.138	17.816	45.534	2.138	17.816	45.534	2.699
3	1.690	14.086	59.621	1.690	14.086	59.621	1.859
4	.939	7.823	67.444				
5	.785	6.538	73.981				
6	.721	6.008	79.989				
7	.605	5.041	85.030				
8	.534	4.450	89.480				
9	.445	3.710	93.191				
10	.328	2.731	95.921				
11	.273	2.276	98.197				
12	.216	1.803	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

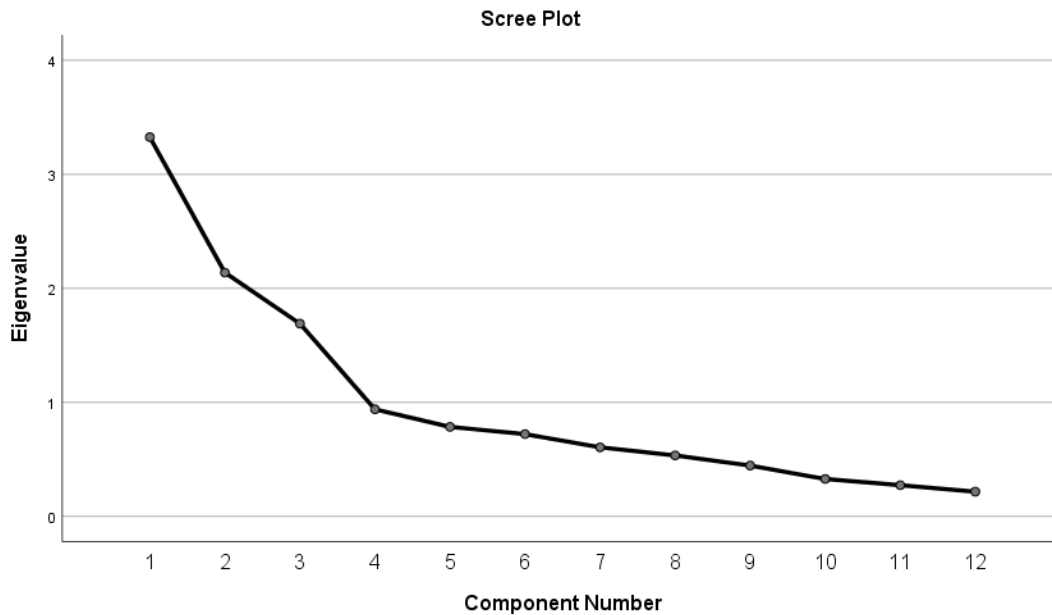a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Scree Plot

Fig 2. Scree Plot

As evident from Figure 2 above, there exist 3 factors that best represent the proposed model. Eigenvalue over 1 shows the existence of these 3 factors.

Principal component analysis was employed via SPSS. The questionnaire initially consisted of 14 items, thereafter resulting in a reduction to 12 to best fit their respective factors. Evident from Table 6, all the factor loadings have values over 0.5 thus passing the validity test as well i.e., the chosen items best represent the factors they are associated with i.e., Component 1 as Brand Ambassadors, component 2 as Purchase Intention, and component 3 as Product Development.

Table 6. Pattern Matrix[a]

	Component		
	1	2	3
BA1	.790		
BA2	.858		
BA3	.680		
BA4	.609		
PD1			.771
PD2			.705
PD3			.805
PI1		-.769	
PI2		-.831	
PI3		-.801	
PI4		-.705	
BA5.	.520		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

4.3 Correlation

Table 7 below represents the correlation between all variables. The correlation between predictor 1 BA and outcome PI is moderate though predictor 2 has a very weak yet statistically significant correlation with the outcome variable. Ideally leaving predictor 2 can be a good move here,

however seeing its collaboration with predictor 1 and its joint effect on the outcome variables can reveal new insight into the analysis, that is to be performed in the upcoming regression model.

Table 7. Correlations

		BA	PD	PI
BA	Pearson Correlation	1	.164	.250**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.053	.003
	N	140	140	140
PD	Pearson Correlation	.164	1	.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.053		.428
	N	140	140	140
PI	Pearson Correlation	.250**	.068	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.428	
	N	140	140	140

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 shows model fit and statistical significance achieved with a value p=0.012 i.e., less than 0.5 in Table 9. However, table 8 shows a non-significant effect of PD on PI individually.

Table 8. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.251[a]	.063	.049	3.29870

a. Predictors: (Constant), PD, BA

Table 9. ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	100.217	2	50.108	4.605	.012[b]
	Residual	1490.755	137	10.881		
	Total	1590.971	139			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), PD, BA

Table 10. Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	7.911	1.986		3.983	.000
	BA	.232	.079	.245	2.923	.004
	PD	.049	.149	.027	.327	.744

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Further, the results in Table 10 show that hypothesis 1 is supported whereas hypothesis 2 despite having a positive association with the outcome variable is not supported. As stated earlier that model fit is achieved, the interpretation can further be made that product development coupled with the presence of brand ambassadors can be decisive for brand revitalization, further impacting customers' purchase intention. Another way to analyze this could be that relying only on product development and not focusing on marketing aspects won't serve the purpose in the long run. This demands the efficacy and significance of integrated marketing communication practices which are discussed in the conclusive section below.

5. DISCUSSION

Stem from the findings of this study as to how brand ambassadors influence brand choice, it's time for Nokia to come up with *Brand Ambassadors to make a strong comeback. A* strategy like reincarnation which was adopted by Nike for Nike Air (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010), Nokia can make the best use of celebrities/athletes/ influencers, etc., who have made strong comebacks in their careers. This will ensure the relatability of the celeb's persona with that of Nokia and will increase catch which will have a better impact on customers' minds. For instance, SRK (an Indian actor) with a global fan base can be one such influencer whose comeback after a long span of average years has been phenomenal. His story can be linked to Nokia's prospective comeback with taglines such as "It's not over until you believe it's over", and "It's never too late to make an impact" etc., Other celebs may include Star footballers, cricketers, basketball players, etc., who have had a bad patch but made a strong comeback.

In continuation with the previous strategy, a *worldwide unified strategy* in the subdomain must be adopted. As in a cluttered era of the ad world, a unified theme might be more impact full. This

further implies the use of a similar ad brief with the minimum of the needed cultural adaptation. It is also suggested that Nokia should identify *a new target market*; especially in the context when the EU is opting for a C-type common charger from 2024, Nokia can just exploit the scenario. The new target market could be the Alpha generation opting for AI features, students looking for learning parameters, professionals aiming for document management, or Gen X wanting entertainment like never before. It can be all or just one thing that could turn out to be a source of competitive advantage for Nokia.

Taking the lead from the previous point, a *worldwide university drive* program can best be implemented for the "knocking" effect. A thing to learn from Pepsi Cola as the company never lets its audience forget that it exists. Also, *Country of Origin (COO)* is already a tested phenomenon in academic research. While Schultz and Jain (2015) discuss the positive effect of the product's country of Origin on the product image, it's time for Nokia to market its Finnish origin to the world. Finnish quality education, Finnish IT development, Finnish quality Life index, etc., are some of the factors that Nokia can link with its origin to have a country-of-origin effect worldwide. As a reference, it could replicate how German brands, and in particular German car brands have been linked with quality for so long.

Further, Ettlie and Subramaniam (2004) have all stressed the significance of *product development* to keep pace with new trends. Therefore. Nokia's R&D should be geared up with product development like never before. This PD may include new designs that must differ from current smartphones to have a unique touch. This might further be achieved by practicing Mass Customization practices with official outlets. Again something that Nike Japan has done. The mode and extent of Mass customization can be a long thought process, but it is something that can sustain a competitive advantage. Other PD measures may include the development of separate apps targeting their respective markets. These apps may range from learning to gaming with the inclusion of AI models. The uniqueness and interface of those apps must be different from the ones being used by current Android phones.

Also, *new brand elements* ranging from a new tagline to a reloaded logo and a new universal jingle in almost all languages as per target markets can be employed. For instance, taglines like "Nokia, reconnecting people" "Nokia reloaded" or "Nokia – from Gen X to Alpha" can be considered. For the logo, the previous handshake image can now be redesigned with a digitized laser-based handshake logo. This may represent innovation and technology hand in hand. In addition, a new

jingle/ music theme can also be developed that can be in line with trends to come in the future. To sum up the discussion, the current decade has witnessed companies opting for the *Societal Marketing Concept* i.e., to return to the environment from where they are earning. This does not only include charity and donations but employs business practices that are environment and public-friendly. From "Go Green" to demotivating plastic bag usage etc., campaigns and procedures should be adopted by Nokia as well to the extent that they make Nokia seen as a responsible brand contributing to both society and its image as well.

6. CONCLUSION

The results have depicted the significance of Integrated marketing communication on purchase intention with a prime focus on the essence of Brand ambassadors. While the focus should be made on emerging marketing practices/ techniques, the essence of establishing a connection with customers is undeniable. This further ensures the validity and effectiveness of the marketing philosophy that should continue to be employed. Also, it reveals the effect that advertisements (TVC, SM, etc.) have on customer's minds, demanding a set of characteristics that the target audience is appealed to. This entails NOKIA or any other brand opting for creative strategies (to be discussed below) which might result in brand recall. This effect of celebrities on shaping consumer behavior is also backed by the works of Mudzakir (2018) and Sadrabadi, Saraji, and MonshiZadeh (2018). The formerly mentioned authors have stressed the need for using brand ambassadors to promote products, in addition to the product suitability with that of brand ambassadors' real-life personalities. Also, the role of strategic management requires continuous evolvement where the strategy evaluation stage demands a new lookout. The implication of strategic management on brand revitalization has been mentioned in the prior research of Monday, Akinola, Ologbenla, and Aladeraji (2015). To add to it the advent of modern technologies ranging from the use of AI tools to innovative product features may be utilized to get the best out of customer lost trust, thus aiding the cause of both brand revitalization and reinforcement.

6.1 Research Limitations

As the brand under observation is highly international, the perception of the sample region might account for differences had the data been collected from other geographical locations. Other constants like economic factors etc., could also have had significant implications. Part of the

respondents also comprises android-influenced smartphones, who might be less aware of Nokia's unique selling points in the past.

6.2 Implications for Future Research

The research can be replicated for further brands facing similar scenarios. Marketing consultancy firms can best be benefited in designing respective strategies whereas academia can further identify factors affecting product decisions and consumer choices. Future research on varying dimensions of consumer behavior and the role of emerging marketing techniques be initiated as well.

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How to cite this article:

Abbas, S. A. (2024). Brand Revitalization of the Declining Mobile Phone Brand via Brand Ambassadors and Product Innovation**.** *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, *Special Issue on Marketing & Design*, May 2024, pp. 69-85.