

# Celebrity Influence And Betting Behaviour Among Young Adults In Abia State, Nigeria: Evidence From Selected Tears Dimensions

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**Abstract:** This study examined how celebrity credibility shapes betting behaviour among young adults in Abia State, Nigeria. Using selected dimensions of the TEARS model trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise the study assessed whether celebrity endorsements influence betting frequency, participation, and preferred betting activity. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Data were collected from 276 valid respondents drawn from Aba South, Ohafia, Osisioma Ngwa, and Umuahia North. The questionnaire measured celebrity trustworthiness, celebrity attractiveness, celebrity expertise, and betting behaviour using five-point Likert-type items. Reliability was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values of .82 for trustworthiness, .79 for attractiveness, and .85 for expertise. Descriptive statistics showed high exposure and receptivity to celebrity betting endorsements. Regression results indicated that celebrity trustworthiness significantly predicted betting frequency ( $\beta = .241, p < .001$ ), celebrity attractiveness significantly predicted betting participation ( $\beta = .310, p < .001$ ), and celebrity expertise had the strongest effect by predicting the type of betting activity ( $\beta = .553, p < .001$ ). The findings suggest that celebrity endorsements do not merely create awareness; they can normalize betting, reduce perceived risk, and steer young adults toward particular betting choices. The study recommends stricter disclosure standards, responsible-gambling warnings in celebrity-led campaigns, and youth-focused media literacy interventions.

**Keywords:** celebrity credibility; TEARS model; betting behaviour; celebrity endorsement; gambling advertising; young adults; Abia State; Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Online and retail betting have become visible features of youth consumer culture in Nigeria. In many urban and semi-urban settings, betting brands are promoted through football-related content, entertainment programmes, mobile applications, social media pages, and celebrity endorsements. This promotional environment is important because betting is not an ordinary consumer product: it carries financial and behavioural risks, particularly for young adults who may be more responsive to peer influence, popular culture, and social-media cues. Nigerian gambling research has already drawn attention to the expansion of betting markets and the need for context-specific evidence on how young people encounter gambling opportunities (Aguocha & George, 2021; Akanle & Fageyinbo, 2019).

Celebrity endorsement is a central marketing device in this environment. Celebrities transfer meaning, status, and emotional appeal from their public image to the product they promote (McCracken, 1989). In betting advertising, this transfer may be especially persuasive when the endorser is a footballer, musician, comedian, actor, or online influencer whose public identity is associated with success, style, confidence, or sports knowledge. The endorsement may make a betting platform appear trustworthy, fashionable, or expert-backed, even when the underlying activity remains risky. International evidence on gambling marketing shows that digital and social-media promotions can blur entertainment and advertising, making gambling content more routine and socially acceptable (Gainsbury et al., 2016; Rossi & Nairn, 2022; Sharman et al., 2024).

The TEARS model provides a useful lens for isolating the attributes through which celebrity endorsers persuade audiences. While the full model includes trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect, and similarity, this study focuses on three dimensions that were most relevant to the questionnaire and empirical tests: trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. Trustworthiness captures perceived honesty and integrity; attractiveness captures appeal, likeability, and style; expertise captures perceived knowledge, competence, or fit with the betting activity. The study, therefore, asks whether these dimensions explain different aspects of betting behaviour among young adults in Abia State.

The study is motivated by a practical and scholarly gap. Many discussions of betting advertising treat celebrity influence as a single force, yet the mechanisms may differ. A trusted celebrity may make repeated betting seem safer; an attractive celebrity may make participation seem desirable; and an expert celebrity, especially one associated with sport, may steer respondents toward sports betting or other perceived skill-based options. Disaggregating these pathways can help marketers, regulators, educators, and public-health stakeholders understand how endorsement strategies work in a high-risk consumer category.

The objectives were to examine the effect of celebrity trustworthiness on frequency of betting, assess the effect of celebrity attractiveness on betting participation, and evaluate the influence of celebrity expertise on the type of betting activity selected by young adults in Abia State. The corresponding hypotheses were stated in alternative form: H1, celebrity trustworthiness significantly predicts betting frequency; H2, celebrity attractiveness significantly predicts betting participation; and H3, celebrity expertise significantly predicts the type of betting activity.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background**

Celebrity endorsement research shows that endorsers can influence attitudes, intentions, and brand evaluations when audiences perceive them as credible and relevant. Erdogan (1999) describes celebrity endorsement as a strategic attempt to borrow the symbolic capital of famous persons and attach it to brands. Ohanian (1990) operationalized three widely used dimensions of endorser credibility—trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness—while later reviews and meta-analytic work found that these qualities can shape advertising effectiveness, brand credibility, and consumer response (Amos et al., 2008; Silvera & Austad, 2004; Spry et al., 2011). For betting, these mechanisms matter because the product involves uncertainty and risk. When a familiar celebrity appears to approve a betting platform, the audience may interpret that approval as a signal of reliability or social legitimacy.

Trustworthiness is the perceived honesty, sincerity, and reliability of the source. In ordinary consumer markets, trustworthiness can reduce scepticism and increase willingness to engage with a brand. In betting markets, this same mechanism may reduce caution. Respondents who believe that a celebrity is transparent and credible may be more willing to believe platform claims, promotional offers, or messages that frame betting as harmless entertainment. This supports the expectation that trustworthiness is associated with betting frequency.

Attractiveness refers not only to physical beauty but also to likeability, charm, style, and social appeal. The source-attractiveness and match-up traditions suggest that attractive endorsers can improve attitudes when their image fits the product or aspirational identity attached to the product (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2013). In youth betting promotions, attractiveness may operate through aspiration and social desirability: the betting brand becomes part of a lifestyle associated with fashionable celebrities, online visibility, and entertainment culture. This supports the expectation that attractiveness increases willingness to participate in betting.

Expertise is the perceived competence or knowledge of the endorser. It is particularly important when audiences believe the product category requires judgment. Betting promotions often draw on sport analysis, odds, prediction language, and claims of insight. A footballer, sports presenter, or popular analyst may therefore appear more relevant than an endorser without a sport-related identity. The match-up hypothesis suggests that persuasive strength increases when endorser expertise fits the endorsed product (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2013). Expertise may not simply increase betting; it may also influence the type of betting activity selected, particularly sports betting.

Digital influencer literature extends these arguments to social media. Influencers are persuasive because they often combine celebrity status with perceived intimacy, constant visibility, and interactive communication. De Veirman et al. (2017), Dhanesh and Duthler (2019), and Hudders et al. (2021) show that influencer credibility and disclosure shape audience response to commercial messages. Betting brands benefit from this environment because endorsements can appear as entertainment, personal opinion, match commentary, or lifestyle content rather than formal advertising.

Gambling studies also underline the need for caution. Internet gambling can intensify availability, speed, and convenience (Griffiths, 2003), while online gambling experiences may involve difficulties maintaining control (Hing et al., 2015). Studies of sports betting audiences and gambling advertising have shown that promotional saturation can influence attitudes and normalize betting, especially when embedded in sports media (Rossi & Nairn, 2022; Seal et al., 2022; Sharman et al., 2024). In Nigeria, betting is closely tied to football fandom and youth culture (Akanle & Fageyinbo, 2019), making celebrity-led betting communication an important site for empirical investigation.

## **3. Methodology**

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The target population consisted of young adult betting customers in selected local government areas of Abia State. Four LGAs were included to capture variation across commercial and residential settings:

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Aba South, Ohafia, Osisioma Ngwa, and Umuahia North. A sample size of 384 was determined using the standard proportion formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. After questionnaire administration, 276 valid responses were retained for analysis, representing the usable sample for the study.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The instrument contained demographic items, betting engagement items, and Likert-type measures of celebrity trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, and betting behaviour. Trustworthiness items captured perceived honesty, reputation, authenticity, and reliability of celebrities who endorse betting platforms. Attractive items captured appeal, likeability, charm, and style. Expertise items captured perceived competence, sport knowledge, and fit between the celebrity and the betting activity. Betting behaviour was measured through frequency of betting, participation, and type of activity.

Content validity was established through expert review by scholars in marketing and management. Construct validity was supported by aligning questionnaire items with the selected TEARS dimensions and the behavioural outcomes tested. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and the values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70: trustworthiness (.82), attractiveness (.79), and expertise (.85).

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression in SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics summarized the respondent profile, betting engagement, and mean responses to the endorsement items. Regression analysis tested whether each celebrity dimension predicted its corresponding betting outcome. Hypotheses were evaluated at the .05 significance level.

Table 1. Respondent profile and betting frequency

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	189	68
	Female	87	32
Age	18–22	60	22
	23–27	53	19
	28–32	48	17
	33–37	58	21
	38–42	57	21
Education	Secondary	78	28
	OND/NCE	75	27
	HND/B.Sc.	68	25
	Postgraduate	55	20
Employment	Student	74	27.3
	Employed	67	24.0
	Self-employed	71	26.2
	Unemployed	64	23.4
Betting frequency	Daily	94	34.0
	Weekly	100	36.1
	Monthly	32	12.0
	Occasionally	50	18.0

Source: Field survey, 2025.

#### 4. Results

The sample was male-dominated, with 189 male respondents (68%) and 87 female respondents (32%). Respondents were distributed across age categories from 18 to 42, with the largest groups between 18 and 37. Educational attainment was mixed: 28% reported secondary education, 27% OND/NCE, 25% HND/B.Sc, and 20% postgraduate qualification. Employment status was also varied, including students, employed, self-employed, and unemployed respondents. All respondents reported engagement in betting, which indicates that the retained sample was appropriate for analysing betting behaviour rather than general awareness alone.

Betting frequency was high. Thirty-four percent reported daily betting, 36.1% weekly betting, 12% monthly betting, and 18% occasional betting. This pattern suggests that for many respondents, betting was not an irregular or incidental activity. It was part of routine entertainment or income-seeking behaviour. Descriptive results also showed favourable responses toward celebrity endorsement cues. The average mean score for trustworthiness was 3.95, indicating agreement that credible celebrities make betting endorsements more believable. The average mean score for betting frequency items was 3.69. Celebrity attractiveness recorded an average of 3.91, while betting participation linked to celebrity endorsement recorded an average of 3.87.

Regression results supported all three hypotheses. For H1, celebrity trustworthiness significantly predicted frequency of betting,  $R = .241$ ,  $R^2 = .058$ ,  $F(1, 274) = 16.894$ ,  $p < .001$ . The standardized coefficient was  $\beta = .241$ , and the unstandardized coefficient was  $B = .369$ . Although the explanatory power was modest, the effect was statistically significant, showing that respondents who perceived celebrity endorsers as more trustworthy tended to report higher betting frequency.

For H2, celebrity attractiveness significantly predicted betting participation,  $R = .310$ ,  $R^2 = .096$ ,  $F(1, 274) = 29.155$ ,  $p < .001$ . The standardized coefficient was  $\beta = .310$ , and the unstandardized coefficient was  $B = .429$ . This indicates that perceived charm, appeal, likeability, and style were associated with a greater likelihood of registering, participating, or developing a more favourable attitude toward betting after celebrity exposure.

For H3, celebrity expertise significantly predicted the type of betting activity,  $R = .553$ ,  $R^2 = .306$ ,  $F(1, 274) = 120.749$ ,  $p < .001$ . The standardized coefficient was  $\beta = .553$ , and the unstandardized coefficient was  $B = .604$ . Expertise was therefore the strongest predictor in the study. This suggests that when respondents perceived a celebrity as knowledgeable or well matched to betting, the endorsement had a stronger influence on the activity they selected.

Table 2. Reliability and descriptive summary

Construct/outcome	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean/summary
Celebrity trustworthiness	5	.82	Mean = 3.95
Betting frequency	5	—	Mean = 3.69
Celebrity attractiveness	5	.79	Mean = 3.91
Betting participation	5	—	Mean = 3.87
Celebrity expertise	5	.85	Reliable scale

Source: Field survey/SPSS output, 2025.

Table 3. Regression summary

Hypothesis/model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F(df)	B	$\beta$	p	Decision
Trustworthiness → frequency	.241	.058	16.894 (1,274)	.369	.241	<.001	Supported
Attractiveness → participation	.310	.096	29.155 (1,274)	.429	.310	<.001	Supported
Expertise → betting type	.553	.306	120.749 (1,274)	.604	.553	<.001	Supported

Source: SPSS version 25.0.

## 5. Discussion

The findings show that celebrity endorsement influences betting behaviour through multiple credibility pathways. Trustworthiness had a statistically significant effect on the frequency of betting. This supports source-credibility theory and Ohanian's (1990) argument that perceived honesty and reliability are central to persuasive communication. In the betting context, trustworthiness may reduce perceived risk. A celebrity with a good reputation can make a betting platform appear legitimate, even though endorsement does not guarantee fairness, financial gain, or responsible play. This finding is consistent with celebrity endorsement literature showing that trust enhances brand response (Silvera & Austad, 2004; Spry et al., 2011; Wang & Yang, 2011).

Attractiveness also predicted participation. This supports the source-attractiveness and match-up perspectives, which emphasize appeal, likeability, and image fit (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2013). For young adults, attractiveness can make betting appear fashionable and socially desirable. In a social-media environment, a celebrity's style, confidence, and lifestyle display can turn a betting message into aspirational content. This is important because participation may begin not through careful evaluation of odds and risk but through positive affect toward the celebrity and the lifestyle attached to the platform.

Expertise produced the strongest effect. This finding is especially meaningful in a market where sports betting is common. A celebrity who is perceived to understand sport, prediction, or betting strategy may influence not only whether young adults bet but also what kind of betting they choose. Expertise can create a sense that betting decisions are informed or skill-based, even when outcomes remain uncertain. This result aligns with the match-up hypothesis and with gambling-marketing studies that show how sport-related promotions can normalize betting within fan culture (Akanle & Fageyinbo, 2019; Seal et al., 2022; Sharman et al., 2024).

The results also support the view that digital celebrity promotion differs from traditional advertising. On social media, endorsement messages may be embedded in humour, match commentary, lifestyle updates, giveaways, or influencer stories. Such formats may reduce audience resistance because they appear relational or entertaining rather than commercial. This reflects wider

influencer-marketing research on authenticity, disclosure, and parasocial persuasion (De Veirman et al., 2017; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Hudders et al., 2021). For betting brands, these features can increase message reach and credibility. For regulators and educators, they create monitoring challenges because persuasive betting cues may be less visible than conventional adverts.

The practical implication is that celebrity-led betting advertising requires stronger ethical control than ordinary product endorsement. The combination of trust, attractiveness, and expertise can normalize betting and encourage repeated engagement. Responsible-gambling warnings should therefore be prominent, not hidden in small print. Paid endorsement disclosures should be clear, especially on social media. Celebrities and influencers should avoid implying guaranteed winnings, expert certainty, or risk-free participation. Campaigns directed at young adults should be assessed not only for legal compliance but also for their potential to intensify risky behaviour.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that selected TEARS dimensions significantly explain betting behaviour among young adults in Abia State. Trustworthiness predicts betting frequency, attractiveness predicts betting participation, and expertise predicts the type of betting activity. Expertise had the strongest effect, suggesting that perceived knowledge and product fit are particularly powerful in betting endorsements. The findings show that celebrity influence is not a single process; it works through distinct psychological cues that shape different behavioural outcomes.

The study recommends stricter regulation of celebrity betting endorsements in Nigeria. Advertising authorities and betting regulators should require clear paid-partnership disclosures, visible responsible-gambling warnings, and restrictions on claims that imply certainty, insider knowledge, or financial success. Betting firms should design campaigns that do not glamorize excessive play or target vulnerable youth audiences. Universities, youth organizations, and media-literacy programmes should teach young adults to distinguish entertainment from persuasion and to evaluate the risks behind celebrity-promoted betting. Celebrities and influencers should also be encouraged to adopt ethical endorsement standards, including refusal of misleading scripts and inclusion of harm-minimization messages.

For marketers, the findings suggest that credibility cues are powerful but should be used responsibly. Building brand trust in a regulated gambling category should not depend on obscuring risk. Sustainable marketing should balance commercial communication with consumer protection, transparent information, and responsible-play norms.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

The study was limited to four LGAs in Abia State and used a cross-sectional survey, so causal claims should be made cautiously. The sample consisted only of respondents who were already engaged in betting; future studies should compare bettors and non-bettors. Self-reported behaviour may also be affected by recall and social-desirability bias. Future research could use longitudinal designs, experimental exposure to celebrity adverts, or qualitative interviews to examine how young adults interpret betting endorsements. Further work should also test the remaining TEARS dimensions—respect and similarity—and compare celebrity influence across gender, rural–urban location, income, and specific betting platforms.

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