

PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF SPORTS BETTING ADVERTISEMENTS ON GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR OF YOUTHS IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS: AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

This study assessed the perception of sports betting advertisements and influence on the gambling behaviour of youths in Makurdi metropolis. Survey research method was adopted for the study, while questionnaire was employed as instrument for data collection. A sample size of three hundred and fifty three (353) was statistically drawn using Taro Yamane's sample determination formula. Data from the study were presented in tables using simple percentages. Findings revealed that youths in Makurdi perceived sports betting advertisements as part of sports which has no harmful influence on them thereby justifying their regular participation in sports betting activities. The study further found that sports betting advertisements have significant influence on Makurdi youths by inducing them to bet more on sports as well as make them nurture intentions to consume sports betting products. The ubiquity of sports betting advertisements, the pressure from peers and the proliferation of bet shops have been found to be the cardinal determinants to the surge of sports betting activities among youths in Makurdi metropolis. The study recommended among others that the current regulatory systems for gambling advertising are ineffective. Urgent restrictions are needed across a

range of media channels to prevent exposure to promotions that may encourage young people's interest and involvement in sports gambling; and that, APCON should continually evaluate existing and newly implemented advertising techniques to ensure that promotions of sports betting products or contents are not unduly targeting youths or increasing the risk of gambling among youths.

Keywords: Perception, Sports Betting, Sports Betting Advertisements, Gambling Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

All over the world today, there is no denial of the fact that sports betting is a rapidly emerging sector of the gambling industry which has permeated almost every strata of human existence. While most forms of gambling on sports have been stable or decreased over the last few years, online betting has nearly doubled its prevalence rate in 2009-2014 periods (Uzuchukwu & Ohiri, 2021). This is due to the popularity of sports among people of different generations hence participants see it as an avenue to enjoy their favourite leisure time while earning from the game they love (Killick & Griffiths, 2018).

Marketing is critical for sports betting operators to compensate for intense competition, limited price elasticity and little product differentiation. Therefore, in their efforts to attract more customers, sports betting companies have deployed promotional techniques such as broadcast advertising on television and radio, online pop-ups on internet sites, celebrity endorsements, direct and third party email and SMS, and loyalty programmes (Hing, 2014). Betting companies have also provided mobile sports betting apps, stream live coverage of sporting events, and promote sports betting through smart phones, including improved odds, money back guarantees, betting tips, offers of credit and bonuses including free bets and deposits (Hing, 2014). These marketing activities have made sports betting an easy activity for individuals of different age categories especially the youths.

Young men are the target market for sports betting companies, and their goal is to use persuasive appeals to stimulate this vulnerable and gullible group into staking a bet. Research has shown that youths who are highly exposed to gambling advertising are likely to be influenced by it (Hing, 2014; Monaghan, Derevensky & Sklar, 2008). Deans, Thomas, Derevensky and Daube (2017) also confirm that gambling advertising can trigger gambling

instincts, may increase already high levels of gambling and may make it more difficult for problem gamblers in particular, to reduce gambling or not gamble at all. Gambling advertising has the potency to instigate youths to try gambling or dream about what they could buy with their winnings. This implies that, the ubiquity of sports betting advertisements are capable of influencing youths to look at gambling as a lucrative social norm.

The growing popularity of sports betting in Nigeria and the active involvement of youth and sports fans is an indication that sports betting is firmly ingrained in country's mainstream culture through sport activities as popularized by advertising. The sports betting industry has been able to take advantage of Nigeria's huge football culture. Some of the big leagues, such as the English Premier League and the Spanish La Liga, have millions of fans in the country. Most of these fans are sports bettors. Studies have shown that a significant proportion of Nigerians polled (77%) attested to the high prevalence of betting and gambling activities in their locality; particularly amongst respondents in the South-West (92%) and South-South (91%) geo-political zones, which recorded the highest prevalence (Temitope, 2019).

In Benue State and Makurdi metropolis in particular, there has been unprecedented upsurge in youths participation in sports betting activities. With the increasing number of online bet shops, football viewing centers and online gaming centers in their vicinity, sports betting has become a ritual for Makurdi youths. Through their smart phones, they are able to stake their bets directly from their bank accounts or online bet wallets. According to Noble, Freund, Hill, White, Leigh, Lambkin, Scully and Sanson-Fisher (2022) one key environmental factor influencing youths into engaging in sports betting is media promotion and advertising of gambling. Young people are increasingly exposed to sports betting advertisements which endorse, promote and glamourize gambling. Sports bettors and fans have reported in a study conducted by Lopez-Gonzalez, Estevez and Griffiths (2017) that sports betting advertising saturate their consumption of televised sports and incentivize their sports betting behaviour, making it more difficult to resist it. It on this background that this study seeks to ascertain the perception of sports betting advertisements and its influence on the gambling intents of youths in Makurdi metropolis.

Statement of the problem

The growing trend of sports betting in Nigeria has stifled divergent scholarly concerns. Nigeria has become a thriving market where sports betting firms have sought to latch on and capture market shares to various degrees of success (Toyosi, Kingsley & Jamiu, 2019, p.24). According to a report by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN, 2019), about 60 million Nigerians between the

ages of 18 and 40 years spend up to N1.8 billion Naira on sports betting daily; and that gambling revenue of some betting companies increased to N20 million monthly. The report further revealed that about 60 million Nigeria youths commit an average of N3, 000 daily to have their lives turned around through sports betting (cited in Ifeduba, *et al.* 2020, para.2).

A survey of Canadian adults found that, while majority of respondents were aware of the negative consequences of gambling and believed that the problems associated with gambling have increased, the majority still indicated that gambling was an acceptable activity (Monaghan, et al. 2008, p.253). Research has also proven that the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling among youths is two to four times higher than the adult population, and that while 55% of adolescents are casual or recreational gamblers, 13% reported having some gambling related problems and 4-6% had more serious problems (Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; cited in Monaghan, et al. 2008, p.253).

The surge of sports betting activities in Makurdi metropolis by the youths has been on the increase. However, one of the causal factors to this increasing rate of sports betting in Makurdi metropolis is alleged to be betting advertisements. Aggressive advertisement and rebranding are vehicles used by betting companies to appeal to the youths and target market to increase patronage in the short and long term (Olaore & Kuye, 2019; cited in Olaore, *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). Moreover, sports fans have reported that sports betting advertising saturate their consumption of televised sport and incentivize their sports betting behaviour, making it more difficult to ignore it. (Derevensky, et al. 2007; as cited in Monaghan, *et al.* 2008, p. 255).

The narcotizing and dysfunctional effects of advertising on children and adolescents has been established in several public health domains, including alcohol, tobacco and junk food consumption, and while regulations are increasingly enforced for these products in recognition of the potential harm caused by certain promotional techniques, the effects of gambling advertisements on youths have been largely neglected (Monaghan et al., 2008, p. 253). This study therefore, seeks to assess the perception of Sports betting advertisements and its influence on the gambling intents of youths in Makurdi metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives this study seeks to investigate include:

1. Ascertain the perception of makurdi youths to sports betting advertisements.
2. Identify the motivations of Makurdi youths to participate in sports betting activities.

3. Examine the influence of sports betting advertisements on the gambling behaviour of Makurdi youths.
4. Identify the factors responsible for the surge of sports betting among youths in Makurdi.

Research Questions

1. How do Makurdi youths perceive sports betting advertisements?
2. What motivates Makurdi youths to participate in sports betting activities?
3. How do sports betting advertisements influenced the gambling behaviour of Makurdi youths?
4. What are the factors responsible for the surge sport betting among youths in Makurdi?

Conceptual Clarifications

Sports Betting

Sports betting is the activity of predicting sports results and placing a wager on the outcome (Anastasovsk & Nanev, 2014; Ng'etich & Auka, 2019). The National Lottery Act 2005 also define sports betting as a kind of gambling where people make predictions about sporting results and place a bet on its outcome with the hope of winning a set prize (Ayandele, Popoola & Obosi, 2019). The higher the number of matches an individual predicts the higher the expected income if the prediction is right at the end of the match.

The frequency of sports bet upon as Ng'etich&Auka (2019) notes varies by culture, with the vast majority of bets being placed on association football, American football, basketball, baseball, hockey, track cycling, auto-racing, mixed martial arts and boxing at both amateur and professional levels. Sports betting can also extend to non-athletic events such as reality show contests and political elections and non-human contests such as horse racing-racing, greyhound racing and illegal underground cockfighting. It is also not uncommon for sports betting websites to offer wagers for entertainment events such as the Grammy Awards, the Oscars and the Emmy Awards. According to Toyosi and Jamiu (2019), popular betting firms in Nigeria include but are not limited to NairaBet, Bet9ja, SureBet, Winners' Golden Bet, 1960 Bet, Bet Colony, Stakers Den. While the foreign betting firms are also not limited to Bet360, Bet 365, 1XBet, 24HBet, 368 Bet, Appollo Bet, Bet-at Home etc.

Gambling

Gambling can be seen as the wagering of money or something of value (stake) on an event with uncertain outcome with the primary intent of winning additional money or material goods

(Ng'etich & Auka, 2019). Gambling is the act of placing a stake on the result of a sporting event with the hope of winning money or a prize at the end of the event or game. The outcome of the wager is often immediate such as single roll of dice but longer time frame are also common, allowing wagers on the outcome of a future sport contest or even an entire sport season.

Appiah & Awuah (2016) have classified gambling into four headings; the first involves the exchange of money or a valuable item (e.g. casinos, poker machine play), second is betting on future events (e.g. football match, race, video games), the third is lotteries (e.g. National Lottery, raffle draw), and lastly is speculating on investments, insurance and stock market dealings. In Nigeria, various patterns of gambling have emerged to accommodate differences in social class. These include but not limited to wagering and betting on the outcome of sporting events or race (football betting, car racing, horse racing, wrestling, basketball, swimming etc., on platforms such as Bet9ja, Naira Bet, Merry Bet, Sure Bet, Betpawa, Ebony Bet, etc.); virtual games (Bingo, Babynseju, Ajasare); casino games (Kalokalo) and Lottery style games (Cross-Lotto, Pools or Baba Ijebu, tickets and keno), all of which award prizes based on the selection of winning symbol or number combinations (Temitope, Oyekola, & Mary, 2019)).

Sports Betting Advertising

Sports betting advertising can be defined as any paid persuasive communication from an identifiable source, designed to induce the receivers to predict and place a wager on the outcome of a particular sporting event with the intent of winning money, if the prediction is right. This form of advertising is always replete with persuasive appeals to trigger the receiver or viewer into waging a bet on a particular sport with the hope of winning money either in short term or in a long term basis. Sports betting operators provide mobile sports betting apps, stream live coverage of sporting events, and promote sports betting through smart phones, and email, including improved odds, money back, guarantees, betting tips, offers of credit and bonuses as well as “free” bets and deposits (Hing, 2014). These persuasive antics of advertising therefore, propel an overwhelming number of youths into placing bets with the intents of winning money. Sports betting advertising is therefore, seen as a situational stimulus that, if transmitted unguarded, may contribute to deviant behaviour such as gambling.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, propounded by Icek Ajzen. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) started as a Theory of Reasoned Action in the 1980s to predict an individual's intention to engage in a behaviour at a specific time and place. The theory

is based on the assumption that individuals make logical, reasoned decisions to engage in specific behaviours by evaluating the information available to them. The performance of a behaviour is determined by the individual's intention to engage in it (influenced by the value the individual places on the behaviour, the ease with which it can be performed and the views of significant others) and the perception that the behaviour is within his/her control (Ryan & Carr, 2010).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) posits that intention, which reflects the effort individuals are likely to direct towards engaging in an activity, predict behaviour. In turn, intentions are influenced by the perceived favourability of the outcome from performing the behaviour (attitude) and the extent the activity is perceived to be approved and/or engaged by others (social norms). The Theory of Planned Behaviour adds the construct of Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), which represents the confidence in one's ability to successfully perform the target behaviour (Flack & Morris, 2017).

The theory is of the contention that the greater media exposure to betting advertisements and promotions has the propensity of enticing the youths towards nurturing an intention to indulge in the act. Again, the outcomes or motivation youths are exposed to through these media contents triggered them into nurturing an intention to exhibit such behaviour with the belief of having control over their actions. The suitability of this theory to this study is reflected in its ability to explain the influence of gambling attitudes (the expected emotional and financial outcomes from gambling), social norms (perceived approval and gambling behaviour of significant others) and cognitive biases (confidence in the ability to determine the outcome of gambling) on the intention to gamble.

Review of Related Literature

Sports Betting Advertisements and the Perception of Youths to Gambling

Young people's interpretation of gambling advertisements and how gambling advertising can influence their attitudes towards gambling have been explored, including research reporting that young people perceived gambling advertisements as making gambling appear as fun and exciting thereby creating a perception that gambling is an escape, a form of entertainment, and of benefit to society (Pitt, 2018). According to Pitt et al (2017), the alignment of marketing for betting products with sports or sporting events may be having an influence on normalizing children's perceptions that gambling is a normal or common part of sport. By making sports betting advertisements a common sight at sporting events, youths have come to perceive betting

advertisements as a mainstream aspect of sports which should be embraced and practiced since the consequences of gambling are sometimes hidden from youths.

This has caused parents to become concerned about how sports betting advertising has normalized or legalized betting for young people. Sports betting advertising was found to have played an influential role in shaping positive perceptions of youths about sports betting. For example, some adolescents described sports betting advertising as depicting sports betting as easy, and could add excitement to the sports viewing experience (Pitt, 2018). The perception of gambling as an innocuous behaviour with few negative consequences is supported by finding that “children and adolescents frequently gamble for money with their parents and other family members, with many reporting their parents purchased lottery tickets for them as gifts” (Monaghan & Derevensky, 2008, p.4). In this context, such adolescent will grow up to see gambling as a harmless activity to depend on when they come of age thereby underestimating the inherent risks in gambling.

In a similar contention, Hurson (n.d) also notes that youths identified betting as social and recreational activities frequently harnessed to relieve boredom as well as establish roles in their social networks. He further stressed that youths enjoy the adrenaline rush that is associated with sports betting and that betting on sports is a great way of showing support for your favourite team. Youths are induced by advertising to believe that gambling is a sport and are learning about gambling activities through sports programming and merchandizing. This has the propensity of normalizing and legitimizing gambling uptake at a youthful age (Hing, 2014). This justifies the believe of most researchers that young people are prone to gambling harm, because they may misunderstand the risks and probability of success and loss involved with gambling (Nyemcsok, Thomas, Bestman, Pitt, Daube & Cassidy, 2018).

Monaghan and Derevensky (2008) have found youths in focus groups emphasized that stressing the negative impact of gambling only motivates trial and risk-taking, especially as gambling is already perceived by youths to be an enjoyable form of entertainment and socially acceptable recreational activity. The clear target market for most sports betting advertising is young adult males. Strategies include using celebrity role models, attractive female presenters and models, and the repositioning of sports betting as an activity for successful, professional young men. Advertising attempts to appeal to the youths through engaging notions of masculinity, team loyalty and sporting knowledge (Hing, 2014). Through the hypnotic and illusory lenses of sports betting advertisements, youths are perceptibly ignoble of any harm associated with gambling. As

such, they see it as an escape from boredom and poverty, depression and to establish a firm social intercourse with their peers.

Influence of Sports Betting Advertisements on the Gambling Behaviour of Youths

In a rapidly changing gambling environment, with the development of new, easily accessible products, and the alignment of these products with major sporting codes, research has shifted from addiction-based models that seek to understand individual vulnerability factors, towards public health frameworks that seek to understand the influencing determinants to gambling (Nyemcsok et al, 2018).

There have been very few studies, especially from a qualitative perspective, that have explored how gambling advertising influences young people's gambling attitudes, behaviours and future consumption intentions. However, researchers have drawn inspiration from the tobacco control study, which demonstrated the impact of marketing in positively shaping or normalizing the attitudes of young people towards cigarettes, and contributing to their subsequent consumption of, and preference for tobacco products (Nyemcsok, et al, 2018; Pitt, 2018).

Studies have shown that the use of voice-overs, music, catchy-slogans, humour, and celebrities in gambling advertisements may have particular appeals for young people, and may contribute to their recall of particular gambling brands (Nyemcsok, et al, 2018). Despite having never gambled, some young people displayed technical knowledge of sports betting, including being able to discuss and describe staking odds, cash-out options, and how to place bets, predominantly because of the advertisements they had seen.

This has confirmed the viewpoint of Hing (2014, p. 8) who notes that, "greater media exposure to gambling advertisements and promotions has been correlated with more positive youth gambling attitudes and intentions towards gambling." The scholar further argues that, young men consider sports-embedded betting promotions as unavoidable, unnecessary and aggressive, sending a dangerous impression about the social acceptance of gambling and its normalized association with being a sports fan. A Queensland survey conducted by Hing (2014) has provided more empirical support to this argument where it was found that half of adults and 2/5 of adolescents could recall unprompted at least one gambling brand from watching televised sports. The study further revealed that adults, adolescents and sports bettors who were exposed to more sports embedded gambling promotion contents were found to have greater intentions to bet on sports. Additionally, sports bettors with gambling problems reported that such promotions have worsened or maintained their gambling problems.

Sports betting commercials have significant influence on youths by making them want to try gambling as well as imagine or dream about what they could buy with their winnings. These illusory thoughts often lead youth into indulging in sports gambling activities with the hope of winning a jackpot someday. Advertising is a powerful force influencing a lot of social disorders and deviant behaviours of youths in our contemporary society. The distorted images of gambling portrayed in betting advertisements generally fail to provide the youthful consumers with portrayals of responsible gambling. The positive portrayal of gambling and its associated glamour and excitement in sports betting advertisements may encourage youths to inadvertently engage in risky gambling with the belief that it may lead to a similar glamorous lifestyle and reinforce the erroneous belief that they possess the skills to repeatedly beat the odds (Monaghan & Derevensky, 2008).

While regulation is strictly enforced to limit the exposure of children and adolescents to violent or sexual contents and behaviour, only few regulatory frameworks are in place to protect youths from the depiction of gambling in the media especially during televised sports (Monaghan & Derevensky, 2008). This implies that as long as youths are not protected by law from the usurping marketing antics of sports betting operators and advertisers, the enduring influence of gambling advertising will continue to manifest in the gambling intentions of youths in Nigeria. This is because gambling advertising has been widely considered as a situational stimulus that, if transmitted irresponsibly, may contribute to gambling problems.

Determinants for the Surge of Sports betting among youths

Despite the observation of Pitt (2018) that much less research has focused on the determinants that may encourage young people to gamble and the factors that may increase their risk of developing harms from gambling, several factors have been identified by various researchers as contributing to the accentuating rate of youth participation in sports betting across the globe and Nigeria in particular.

The proliferation of indigenous betting industries and their endorsement by celebrities has the propensity of inducing many youths into gambling. Studies have demonstrated that when celebrity endorsements are used, advertisements are more believable, message recall is enhanced, brand recognition improves, and positive attitudes about brand results (Olaore, Adejare & Udofia, 2020). According to Monaghan and Derevensky (2008) youths are developmentally establishing their independence and identity and are heavily influenced by role models, making them particularly susceptible to celebrity endorsements. The use of popular football idols such as

Austin Okocha (BetKing), Nwankwo Kanu (SportyBet) and Victor Ikpeba (Bet9ja) in betting advertisements is a determinant to induce their youthful fans into betting.

The influx of new technologies and the internet have provided a fertile and attractive environment for young people to participate in gambling. These technologies have provided the ease for youths to gamble from home, the ability to gamble persistently directly from their accounts as well as accord them freedom to gamble online (Pitt, 2018). These innovations have induced the youths and increased their participation in sports betting, and have given them more room to bet from the comfort of their homes or wherever they are (Olaore, et al, 2020). The ability and comfort these technologies have provided for bettors make it easy to place a stake on games and also check online if they win.

The excitement and entertainment that is associated with sports betting and the possibility of winning have been found to be the main reasons youths enjoy gambling online, as well as convenience, accessibility, and privacy/anonymity. The high speed nature of online gambling, online sites that allow youths to play games without money and youth friendly promotional material as contributing to the risk of young people developing or exacerbating current gambling problems (Pitt, 2018).

Researchers have argued that because gambling is a socially accepted pastime in some communities, gambling can be seen as a 'rite of passage' for young people. Researchers have overwhelmingly focused on the role of families in encouraging these perceptions in young people. For example, studies have shown that young people who have parents that gamble were more like to gamble themselves, and were also more likely to develop problems with gambling (Pitt, 2018, p.39). Findings have also established that young people often gamble within their own home, in many instances with their parents facilitating gambling or aware of their gambling behaviours (Pitt, 2018, p.40).

Peers have been identified as one of the socialization agents that facilitate individuals' gambling attitudes and behaviours. Susceptibility to peer pressure tends to encourage positive social norms towards sports betting and gambling behaviour. Social norms have figured centrally in several psychological theories such as the Social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and refer to common standards for behaviour, set by and for members of social groups. For instance, Social Learning Theory believes that social norms may influence youths by providing cues or opportunities to conform to appropriate behaviour in a group (Parado-Gonzalez, Fernandez-Calderon, Newall & Leon-Jariego, (2023).

Studies have shown that the idleness of most Nigeria youths informed their decision to seek refuge in sports betting indicating that up to 70% of the youth sub population is not productively engaged (Okon, 2015 as cited in Olaore, et al., 2020, p.4). The geometric increase in Nigeria's population coupled with the increasing issues of unemployment and underemployment has pushed many youths to look up to betting as an escape and means of sustenance.

The get-rich-quick syndrome which is stifled by the loss in the age-old value system where the watchword was the dignity of labour has been entrenched by the Nigerian youths. Dignity of labour has been relegated to the abyss by many Nigerian youths for the desire to make quick money devoid of any sweat. Most youths take recourse to betting games with the intent of winning instant cash while abandoning hard work and dignity of labour (Olaore, et al, 2020).

Gambling is also presented as an alternative to hard work and sensible investment, and instead promotes luck, instant gratification and entertainment (e.g., New York's "All you need is a dollar and a dream advertisement"). The use of marketing campaigns promoting gambling as a way of securing an ideal, easy, immediate future has been viewed as particularly dangerous when viewed by youths who may neglect other important pursuits, including employment and academic studies, to gamble (Monaghan, et al, 2008).

The poor regulatory framework by the Nigerian government has also been seen as a factor encouraging youth participation in betting activities. There is no specific provision in the law to regulate online gambling. The government is more attracted to the revenues being generated from the gambling industry than regulating its social, economic and psychological effects it would have on her youths.

METHODS

This study adopted the survey research design with questionnaire as the instrument for eliciting relevant data. This research method was considered appropriate for the study it is economical and as Mmaduakonam (1998) observed, it permits a study of representative sample to make inference on the general population that would have been too expensive to study as a whole. The population of the study is the entire residents of Makurdi Local Government Area whose population according to the 2006 National Populations Census stands at 300,377 people (NPC, 2006).

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample size of three hundred and fifty-five (353) was statistically determined using the Taro Yamane's sample determination formula. Makurdi metropolis was then divided into two (2) major settlement areas: Makurdi North and Makurdi South for research convenience. Five (5) sub-settlements were purposively selected from Makurdi North namely, Uni-Agric, Lafia Garage, Agan and NASME Road. While Makurdi South had Logo 1, Gyado villa, Wadata, High Level and Kanshio as the five (5) sub-settlements selected. These sub-settlements were selected because of the availability of bet and gaming shops, football viewing centers and youth population. Simple random sampling was then used to select either a bet and gaming shop or a football viewing center from each of the sub-settlements. Five (5) bet and gaming shops were randomly selected each from the sub-settlements in Makurdi South; while in Makurdi North, three bet and gaming shops were randomly selected with two (2) football viewing centers. Thirty respondents were randomly sampled from each of the eight (8) bet and gaming shops, while fifty five (55) and fifty eight (58) respondents were respectively selected from the football viewing centers totaling up to three hundred and fifty three (353) respondents. The selection of the respondents was strictly based on those who have knowledge about sports betting.

RESULTS

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data collected were presented using simple percentages and frequency distribution tables for easy visibility and comprehension. Out the 353 (100%) questionnaire administered, 346 (98%) were successfully retrieved while 7 (2%) suffered mortality. The retrieved 346 copies were used for the analyses as presented in tables below:

Table 1: Perceptions of Makurdi youths to sports betting advertisements

Response options	Frequency	Percentages%
Sports betting advertisements are all part of sports	107	31%
Sports betting advertisements are harmless	104	30%
They persuade youths to make easy money	30	9%
Sports betting advertisements are bet promoters	54	16%

They are part of entertainment during sports	51	14%
Total	346	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

The data displayed on Table 1 indicates youths' perceptions to sports betting advertisements in Makurdi metropolis. Findings have shown that, out of the 346 respondents sampled 31% have perceived sports betting advertisements to be part of sports, 30% of the respondents have perceived sports betting advertisements to be harmless, 9% have perceived it to be persuasive to the youth to make easy money, 16% see betting advertisements as just bet promoters while the remaining 14% have perceived sports betting advertisements to be part of entertainment.

Table 2: Makurdi youths' participation in gambling activities

Response options	Frequency	Percentages%
Makurdi youths participate in gambling sometimes	130	38%
Makurdi youths always participate in gambling	216	62%
Makurdi youths have never participated in gambling	-	-
Makurdi youths have no idea about gambling	-	-
Total	346	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

Data on Table 2 as presented has shown Makurdi youths' participation in gambling activities. The results have confirmed that, 38% of the total sampled respondents have gambled sometimes, while 62% of the remaining respondents have always participated in gambling activities.

Table 3: Influence of sports betting advertisements on Makurdi youths' gambling behaviour

Response options	Frequency	Percentages%
It influences youths to bet more on sports	129	37%
It makes sports betting easier and more flexible	22	6%
It introduces youths to better odds and cash out options	89	26%
It appeals to youths' desire for fast and easy wealth	31	9%
It encourages consumption intentions of youths towards gambling	75	22%
Total	346	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 3 aimed at establishing how sports betting advertisements have influenced the gambling behaviour of youths in Makurdi metropolis. Findings have confirmed that, out of the 346 total respondents sampled, 37% have confirmed that sports betting advertisements have influenced them to bet more on sports, 6% of the respondents have noted that sports betting advertisements have made sports betting to become easier and more flexible for them, 26% of the respondents have confirmed that sports betting advertisements have introduced youths to better odds and cash out options for them to explore, another 9% were of the view that sports betting advertise have appealed to youths' desire for fast and easy wealth, while 22% were of the belief that sports betting advertisements have encouraged them to always have consumption intentions towards gambling.

Table 4: Factors responsible for the Surge of sports betting among youths in Makurdi metropolis

Response options	Frequency	Percentages%
Unemployment	24	7%
The desire for fast wealth	35	10%
Access to viewing centers	15	4%
Proliferation of bet shops	56	16%
The ubiquity of sports betting advertisements	113	33%
Peer pressure	82	24%
Access to internet services/ICTs	21	6%
Total	346	100%

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 4 sought to identify the factors responsible for the surge of sports betting among youths in Makurdi metropolis. The results have indicated that, 7% of the respondents attributed the surge of sports betting to youth unemployment, 10% of the respondents have blamed it on youths' desire to make fast wealth, 4% have lodged it on youths ability to access viewing centers at ease, 16% of the respondent have also attributed it to the proliferation of bet shops. However, an overwhelming 33% of the respondents identified the ubiquity of sports betting advertisements as a motivating factor to their sports betting behaviour, whereas, 24% were of the view that peer pressure is a significant factor on their sports betting attitudes, while 6% have noted that youths' access to internet services/ICTs is also another determinant.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed clearly that youths in Makurdi metropolis perceived sports betting advertisements as part of sports which has no harmful influence on them thereby justifying their regular participation in sports betting activities. This result is in accordance with finding of the National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC) whose study in 2007 reported that, the growing perception by youths that sports betting advertising is innocuous, normal and legitimate has accentuated youths' participation in gambling activities. The commission's study further revealed that 77% of Nigerian youths confirmed the increased patronage of betting activities where they resided.

Further revelations from the study indicated that sports betting advertisements have significant influence on Makurdi youths by inducing them to bet more on sports, enabling them to understand better odds and cash out options to bet as well as make them nurture consumption intentions for sports betting products. Corroborating this result is Lee, Lemanski and Jun (2008) who reported in their study that exposure to gambling contents in the media led to positive attitude towards gambling shows and advertisements, both of which led to stronger gambling intentions (Bell & Boldero, 2011, p. 22).

The ubiquity of sports betting advertisements, the pressure from peers and the proliferation of bet shops have been found to be the cardinal determinants to the surge of sports betting activities among youths in Makurdi metropolis. This finding was earlier confirmed by a study conducted by Pitt et al (2017) where they reported that many children indicated consumption intentions towards sports betting. This was due to four key factors: (i) the alignment of gambling with culturally valued activities; (ii) the perceived knowledge about sports; (iii) the marketing and advertising of gambling products (and in particular sports betting); and (iv) the influence of friends and family (Thomas & Derevensky, 2017, para. 3).

CONCLUSION

Sports betting has become part of everyday life for youths due to constant stream of advertisements that make them more likely to nurture consumption intentions of such contents. Sports betting advertisements have portrayed gambling as fun, harmless and as a legitimate activity. The portrayal of sports betting as a normal societal value has changed the perceptions of youths towards sports betting. This has triggered their increased

participation in gambling activities amidst its unwholesome influence on them. Sports betting advertisements do not only influenced them into betting more on sports, it has also induced them to nurture consumption intentions of such gambling contents been promoted. Apart from the ubiquity of sports betting advertisements, peer pressure and the proliferation of bet shops around youths' vicinities are the salient factors contributing to the surge of sports betting activities in Makurdi metropolis.

Recommendations

Based on the key objectives of the study and the findings made, this study recommends that:

1. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) should continually evaluate existing and newly implemented advertising techniques to ensure that promotions of sports betting contents or products are not unduly targeting youths or increasing the risk of gambling among youths.
2. The current regulatory systems for gambling advertising are ineffective. Urgent restrictions are needed across a range of media channels to prevent exposure to promotions that may encourage young people's interest and involvement in sports gambling.
3. Advertisers should ensure as a matter of necessity to spell out the harmful effects of sports betting the same way it is done in tobacco advertising to enable youths understand the inherent harm of gambling on sports.
4. The National Lottery Regulatory Commission (NLRC) should live up to its responsibilities by setting standards, guidelines and rules governing sports betting in Nigeria to save the situation of youths gambling in the country.

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