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University Gamblers: The Power of Persuasive Messaging in Television Advertising

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**University Gamblers: The Power of Persuasive
Messaging in Television Advertising**



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Abstract

Purpose: To find out the influence of Television's persuasive messages on sports betting among university students in Kenya.

Methodology: The study employed a mixed method design. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used. Descriptive survey strategy was also used to gather and analyze data with the aim of understanding the patterns, behaviors, and attitudes related to television's message appeals and sports betting among university students in Kenya. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. A regression model was employed to identify the relationship between the variables.

Findings: The study established a strong relationship between message appeals and sports betting among university students in Kenya. The initial results, without moderating variables, yielded an R-squared value of 0.152. This indicates that 15.2% of sports betting could be explained by message appeals alone. However, when the moderating variable (media literacy) the R-squared value increased substantially to 0.431. This meant that, in the presence of the moderator, 43.0% of sports gambling was accounted for by message appeals. Furthermore, the p-values in both models were less than 0.05, ascertaining that the relationships were statistically significant. The study arrived at the conclusion that message appeal had a strong impact on betting patterns among university students in Kenya.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:

The study was guided by Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The core assumption for this model is that there are two routes in communication process namely central route and the peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). As of the central route the consumer of the relayed message actively processes it then makes judgement based on rational evaluation of the message content, such as the quality of arguments and supporting evidence. In peripheral route the receiver does not expend the cognitive energy to evaluate the arguments but is rather guided by peripheral cues (Akpan, Nda & Nketa, 2015). Advertisers will only meet their expectations when the consumers engage through the peripheral route.

Keywords: *Message Appeals, Television's Advertisements, University Students, Betting, Persuasive*

JEL Codes: *M37, D91, L82, Z13*

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INTRODUCTION

Television has been the cornerstone of consumers' media consumption for decades; and, correspondingly television advertising has been the centerpiece of the marketing mix as well (Malthouse, Maslowska, & Franks, 2018). One of the benefits of television advertising (Akpan, Nda, & Nketa, 2015) is its ability to relay information to a very large audience. In today's society, particularly in Kenya, television set is available in almost every household thus making it easier to receive messages from the advertisers.

Television advertising is regarded as the most effective form of advertisement. Findley, Johnson, Crang, and Stewart (2020) found out that despite the rise of digital media and new technological development, television remains one of the most effective platform for advertising. This is due to its ability to capture consumers' attention, building awareness, and creating a preference for a product. When message is relayed repeatedly then the consumers become aware of the benefits of the product being advertised. Each step in the history of television has had a profound effect on advertising (Malthouse, Maslowska, & Franks, 2018). Television advertisement thus remains one of the most powerful and influential mediums for reaching a broad audience, combining visual storytelling with emotional appeal to shape consumer purchase behaviour, build brand recognition, and drive market demand.

In recent past, however, the choice of television advertising has gone beyond traditional product promotion to include services and behaviours that are more socially and ethically complex, key among them is sports betting. This renaissance has been observed during live sports broadcasts where advertisers tend to engage the highly emotionally invested audience. The advertiser strategically position their advertisements during games to capitalise on the viewers' excitement and anticipation seemingly blending the act of watching sports with betting. The live sporting events have thus become productive ground for embedding betting contents. Killick and Griffiths (2023) reaffirms that betting advertisements are often strategically placed within the sporting environment such as on-screen graphics, commentary mentions, and in-stadium signage. This has thus made it an integrated and frequently unavoidable component of the viewing experience.

Advertising plays a crucial role in the society. As a social event, advertising expresses a key change in values, beliefs, behaviour and buying patterns of the consumers that influence their lifestyles (Usman, Hussain, & Qureshi, 2010). As the popularity of televised sports and betting platforms has grown, so too has the presence of betting advertisements during major sporting events and prime-time broadcasts. This trend has sparked significant public and academic concerns over the potential social and psychological impacts. Lopez-Gonzalez and Griffiths (2018) argue that sports betting, particularly in soccer, has certainly been an asynchronous experience whereby watching football served among other things, as an authentication of the result of a bet placed hours or days before the match.

This emphasizes how the narrow gap between placing a bet and observing the outcome creates a unique anticipation dynamic that intensifies fan engagement. In essence, the act of watching the match transforms from mere entertainment into a form of proof, where the match's progress confirms or challenges the bettor's prediction. This is because every individual bets with the aim of winning. Consequently, this asynchronous nature deepens the emotional investment of bettors, thereby linking their gambling behavior closely to the viewing experience.

Problem Statement

Sports betting is considered in many countries as a public health issue that requires an urgent intervention through legislation (Binde, Romild, & Volberg, 2017). Scholars have raised concerns that betting, if not controlled could lead to serious catastrophe. Kenya on its part has recorded a significant growth in the betting industry. What starts as a hobby ends up becoming addictive, as the excitement of the occasional win slowly gives way to a constant need to chase losses, risking more time, money, and emotional well-being in pursuit of an outcome that's never guaranteed. As a result cases of university students dropping out of campus due to frustrations have been on the rise. In addition, there have been media reports of cases of university students committing suicide after losing bets. This has been occasioned by often using money that was originally meant for tuition fees. Such a loss often led to overwhelming frustration and despair. A case example is a Kenyatta University student in Migori County who committed suicide after losing Kenya shillings 80,000 in a football bet. The student had placed the money on a high-stakes UEFA Euro 2016 match between Germany and Italy, betting Ksh. 40,000 on each team. The match ended in a draw, leading to the loss of both bets. The student left behind a note indicating that the money was for his tuition fees, and for that reason, he saw no reason to live (Otieno, 2016). In another case, Brian Ongwae, a 22 years old student from the Catholic University of East Africa (CUEA) committed suicide after losing Ksh. 15,000 to betting. The amount was meant for paying his tuition fees (Citizen Digital, 2024).

Studies have further found out that there is a significant relationship between risky betting and both addictive alcohol use and smoking. In addition, there is a clear linear relationship between problem in gambling level and measure of psychological distress (Mehari, & Koye, 2019). A major catalyst in the betting menace has been the popularity of English Premier League (EPL) among the young people. Most of these bets are placed on these games. The rise in betting activities among university students thus presents a significant risk to both the current and future generations. The trend has raised concerns among stakeholders regarding youth financial and mental well-being. Addressing this issue, therefore, will be crucial in safeguarding the well-being and prospects of young people in the academia.

Theoretical Review

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was proposed by Petty et al. (1983). The model suggests that the communication process follows two distinct pathways. They are; the central route and the peripheral route. In the central route the person processing the information actively think through the information being passed by the advertisers. The individual is subsequently influenced by the logical reasoning of the arguments being presented before making an informed choice on whether to purchase or ignore the product. When consumers, take the time to scrutinize advertising messages, they may become hesitant to go for the product, as they may become aware of effectiveness of the products being advertised. As a result, such consumers may less likely experience regret, unlike the consumers who may purchase a product without putting much thought. Petty et al. (1983) further argue that when consumers engage with messages containing strong arguments, they are more likely to develop well-founded and thoughtful responses. However, when processing messages with a weak argument, consumers have the tendency to generate unfavourable thoughts (Chou, Wang, Lai, Tung, Yang, & Tsai, 2020).

The peripheral route on the other hand occurs when the recipient of the information fails to use the cognitive energy to assess the message and process the information being presented but is

instead influenced by peripheral cues. Such cues could include attributes such as source credibility, the way the message is relayed and the mood of the receiver upon getting the information. Advertisers will most likely achieve their objectives when consumers take the peripheral route. This is because advertisers mainly expect the consumers accepting their messages at face value. They hardly expect the consumers to analyse their messages critically (Akpan, Nda, & Nketa, 2015). The university students will often process betting ads via the peripheral route, responding to celebrity endorsement, emotion, or humour, rather than evaluating risks critically. As result they may end up engaging in betting consistently with the expectation of winning.

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), Elaboration Likelihood Model is widely used in advertisement and has a significant effects on advertising. In this case, different types of advertising appeals may be effective under different circumstance.

Message Appeals

Advertising appeals evoke positive responses to satisfy consumers' psychological needs (Kunkel, Walker, & Hodge, 2019). Although both emotional and informational messages can be conveyed through digital native advertising, most practitioners consider emotional messages especially effective (Harms, Bijmolt, & Hoekstra, 2017). Emotional appeals maybe inform of musicals, fear humour, sympathy or pride among others. The advertisers may employ these techniques depending on circumstance.

Humour in advertising is very common (Tellis, 2004). Often, the humour is weakly related or even unrelated to the brand. Such ads may seem to trivialize the brand or message. Advertisement containing humour have been shown to attract consumer attention and positively influence attitudes towards it, the brand and affective consumer responses (Eisend, 2009). During the customer decision journey, informational content becomes more effective in closer proximity to the actual purchase decision (Harms, Bijmolt, & Hoekstra, 2017).

In the context of sports betting, humour is deliberately used in advertising to minimize the perceived seriousness and risk involved in betting. By presenting betting as a fun, harmless, or even social activity, these advertisements can convince viewers and reduce their natural risk of disliking betting activities. This framing may in a way influence university students who are highly vulnerable to peer pressure and social validation, making them more likely to perceive betting as a normal and low-risk activity.

In most cases, consumers appear more receptive to emotional content in the brand awareness and preference phases, but then factual information helps them convert to a purchase (Harms, Bijmolt, & Hoekstra 2017). The use of fear appeals assumes that when people are emotionally confronted with the negative effects of their behaviour, they are likely to change that behaviour (Kok, Peters, Kessels, Hoor, & Ruiter, 2018). That reasoning in this case is simple and intuitive, but only true under specific, rare circumstances (Kok, Peters, Kessels, Hoor, & Ruiter, 2018).

Another form of message appeal is fear appeal. This strategy is commonly used by advertisers to evoke emotions among consumers. In most cases, this strategy is designed to create fear by describing the terrible things that can happen to an individual in case they don't follow what the advertiser recommends (De Pelsmacker, 2011). In sports betting advertisements, fear appeals are presumably used to manipulate vulnerable students into believing that they could miss out on winning or social recognition if they don't participate in betting. For students, this tactic can exploit fears of being left behind or appearing out of touch with their peers. It makes

an individual feel the odd one out. It thus reinforces the idea that betting is not only financially rewarding but also socially expected, subtly pressuring them into risky behavior. This tactic exploits their anxieties and uncertainties, making them more susceptible to taking risks they might otherwise avoid. This can even happen in a situation where a student had no plans of doing so. Sun et, al. (2023) argue that just like in advertising, the role of fear appeal in persuasion can be nonlinear in the e-health context. The more the message is threatening the greatest the fear it can evoke on consumers. Therefore, as a strategic advertising approach, Gebreselassie and Bougie (2019) re-affirm that advertisers may deliberately combine a negative appeal, such as fear, with a positive appeal, like humour, to boost sales. This blend of contrasting emotional triggers can capture attention more effectively and create a memorable impact on consumers. The advertisers understand consumer behaviour and for that reason, the way the message is designed is not accidental but deliberate.

Studies on Message Appeals and Advertisement

Xu and Jeong (2018) conducted a research study aimed at examining how different types of message framing in advertisements, combined with various green practices, affect consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions toward environmentally friendly or "green" restaurants. Specifically, the study sought to compare the persuasive effectiveness of attribute-based message appeals; those that emphasize specific features or actions taken by a business; with benefit-based appeals, which focus on the positive outcomes or advantages for the consumer.

To explore this, the study employed an online survey methodology, combining responses from 363 participants. The survey presented various advertising circumstances related to green restaurants, differing in both the type of green practices (e.g., food-focused vs. operational-focused) and the message framing used. The results indicated that benefit-based appeals were generally more persuasive than attribute-based appeals when promoting green restaurants. Consumers responded more favourably to messages that highlighted the personal or societal benefits of green practices, such as improved health or environmental sustainability, rather than those that merely described the technical features or green credentials of the restaurant.

On its findings, the study found out that there was a matching effect between the type of green practice and the nature of the message appeal. In this case, restaurants that implemented food-focused green practices such as using organic or locally sourced ingredients, saw a stronger impact when their advertisements used benefit-based messaging. For example, a message stating that locally sourced ingredients lead to fresher, healthier meals was more compelling than one merely noting the use of such ingredients without emphasizing benefits. This suggested that aligning message framing with the type of sustainable practice could significantly enhance the persuasiveness of green marketing efforts.

In a related study of advertising research, Hendriks and Strick (2019) investigated the role of humour in alcohol advertisements and its influence on interpersonal communication and persuasive outcomes. The study involved 114 students from Leiden University, who were recruited through convenience sampling. Participants were paired in same-sex dyads and randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: exposure to a humorous alcohol advertisement, a positive (non-humorous) alcohol advertisement, or no advertisement at all (control group).

The findings revealed several key insights. First, participants who viewed the humorous advertisement were significantly more likely to engage in conversations; both about the advertisement itself and about alcohol in general, compared to those in the other two

conditions. These conversations were also longer and more engaged, indicating that humour in advertising had a strong potential to stimulate interpersonal discussion. Second, the humour-based advertisements prompted more positive evaluations and discussions about the ad, suggesting that humour not only grabs attention but also fosters a more favourable reception.

These results highlight the potential of humour as a strategic tool in persuasive advertising, especially when the goal is to initiate conversation and potentially influence social norms and behaviours related to product consumption. According to Hendriks and Strick (2019), the social interactions triggered by humorous ads could help explain their effectiveness in increasing product appeal and consumption, thereby pointing to humour as a promising technique in behaviour change communications.

The above studies emphasize the importance of aligning message appeal with the audience's expectations and context. While Xu and Jeong (2018) illustrate that benefit-based appeals outperform attribute-based ones by tapping into personal and societal outcomes, Hendriks and Strick (2019) show that humour fosters engagement and interpersonal influence. In the betting context, advertisers can utilize these strategies to normalize betting behaviour among university students. By framing betting as socially beneficial such as winning a huge amount of money, peer recognition and using humour to reduce the perceived risks, advertisers may effectively influence both attitudes and behaviours of those involved in betting. The use of these appeals exploits emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities, gradually shifting risk perception and leveraging peer dynamics to promote betting activities.

Study Gap

Despite the extensive research conducted on advertising techniques, a significant gap remains in understanding the relationship between advertising messaging and sports betting. Limited literature exists on studies specifically examining the link between message appeals and sports gambling. This study thus aimed to address this gap by exploring how advertising messaging can influence sports gambling patterns among university students. While previous studies have primarily employed either quantitative or qualitative methods, this research employed a mixed-methods approach to gather wide-ranging insights on the power of persuasive messaging on sports gambling.

To frame and interpret these findings, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was employed. This model provided a theoretical lens for understanding how individuals process persuasive messages via two routes namely; the central route and the peripheral route. In the context of sports betting, this model helped to explain how university students might have been influenced either through rational evaluation of risks and rewards or through emotionally charged appeals that bypass critical thinking.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

A mixed method design was used in the study. In this case, quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same period. The study further employed descriptive survey strategy. The collected data was then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. A sample of 400 students was drawn from students across all four public universities located in Nairobi, Kenya. These were; Co-operative University of Kenya, Multimedia University of Kenya Technical University of Kenya and University of Nairobi. A snowball and purposive sampling were used to identify the respondents. Questionnaires were employed to gather both qualitative and

quantitative data. In-depth interviews were used in the study. The quantitative data collected was presented and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to make sense of the data. To understand how the variables were related, correlation and regression analyses were conducted. The relationship between the variables was then explained using a regression model, which was expressed as: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + e$.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Message Appeals and Sports Gambling

Message Appeals	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
Linking my losses to advertising messages encourages me to bet.	4.13	1.221	325
Due to messages from advert, winning once makes me believe that I will win again.	4.27	1.168	325
Emotional relayed in adverts encourages me to bet.	3.79	1.381	325
The arguments on television adverts provide techniques for betting.	4.01	1.125	325
Logical messages that are portrayed in advertising contributes to winning.	3.90	1.243	325
Humour as used by advertisers is the main contributor to my betting activities.	3.81	1.424	325
How a message is coined on television advertisement determines whether I should participate in betting or not.	3.87	1.293	325
Average	3.970	1.264	325

The study aimed to determine the extent to which respondents linked their losses to advertising messages as a motivation to continue betting. The questions were on a Likert scale of (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral agree and strongly agree). The findings revealed that a significant number of participants agreed with this notion, reflected by a high average score of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 1.221. This in a way highlighted a strong influence of advertising on their perception of losses. Additionally, to assess how winning once affected their belief in the possibility of continued success (a belief often reinforced by advertisers), the respondents reported an even higher average agreement score of 4.27, with a standard deviation of 1.168. This clearly suggested that an initial win played a powerful role in encouraging ongoing betting behavior. Furthermore, when asked about the impact of emotional appeals in advertising on their betting decisions, most respondents agreed that these emotional triggers significantly motivated their engagement, as shown by a mean score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.381. Taken together, these findings emphasize the compelling role that advertising; through messages related to losses, wins, and emotional appeals, plays in shaping betting behavior among university students in Kenya.

Regarding the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that the rational arguments presented in TV advertisements influenced their belief in betting, the findings showed a majority agreed with this statement. This was represented by an average score of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 1.125. Additionally, respondents agreed that logical messages in

advertising motivated their participation in betting, with a mean score of 3.92 and a standard deviation of 1.243.

The respondents further concurred that humor in advertising significantly contributed to their betting behavior. This was supported by a mean score of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 1.424. When asked whether the way a message was framed in a TV advertisement affected their decision to participate in betting, the respondents again agreed, as shown by a mean score of 3.87 and a standard deviation of 1.293.

The combined average score for all items was 3.97 and a standard deviation of 1.264, indicating overall agreement that message appeals had a significant impact on sports gambling among university students in Nairobi, Kenya. Advertisements emerged as a major factor enticing students to engage in betting. Table 1 above summarizes these findings.

Table 2: Participation in betting

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	255	78.5	78.5
No	70	21.5	21.5
Total	325	100.0	100.0

The respondents were further asked whether their participation in sports betting was influenced by the messages conveyed by advertisers. The results revealed that 78.5% of the participants were influenced by messages put forth by the advertisers, while 21.5% of the participants were not. This indicates that a majority of those who engaged in sports betting did so as a result of the persuasive messages delivered by advertisers. To gain deeper insights, the study also conducted in-depth interviews to explore how message appeals shaped the betting patterns of respondents and five key themes emerged, namely: attention, amount, millionaire, winning, and humour.

The advertisements appeared to effectively capture the respondents' attention. A notable technique was the use of the word "you," which made the messages feel personalized. Examples of such appeals included phrases like "try your luck, you could be the next winner," "you are our champion," and "we value you." Four participants emphasized this point, with one stating, "anytime I hear the word 'you', I felt as if I was being directly addressed" (Participant 002). This personalized appeal made respondents feel the messages were tailored specifically for them, encouraging their participation in sports betting.

The cost of betting was another powerful emotional factor. All participants noted that the minimum betting amount was affordable, sometimes as low as twenty shillings (KES 20). Advertisements often compared this small stake to the possibility of winning a large sum, such as a million shillings. One promotional message stated, "*Usitupe mbao, with as little as 20bob, you could be our next millionaire,*" meaning "Don't miss this chance, with just KES 20, you could become our next millionaire." This comparison made betting seem low-risk and highly rewarding, which particularly appealed to students with limited funds. Many were tempted to try their luck with a small amount, and even if they didn't win, they continued betting with the hope of eventual success, often until they ran out of money. In addition, some students evaluated themselves by comparing themselves to other. The advertisers portrayed the winners as better than those who did not participate in betting. This in a way encourages university students to participate in betting due to fear of being left out.

The hope of becoming wealthy was a major lure for university students. The interviews revealed that almost every student dreamed of becoming a millionaire, and the advertisers' messages made it seem like a simple and achievable goal. Phrases like "this could be your chance of become the next millionaire, keep betting" were common. Those who engaged in sports betting were highly motivated by the prospect of wealth, and even small winnings reinforced their belief that bigger wins were possible.

On matters of winning, it came out clearly that winning was a strong motivational appeal. Respondents expressed that their primary goal was to win bets. Advertisers reinforced this desire by suggesting that "the more you play, the greater your chances of winning." This message encouraged persistent participation. One respondent shared, "Whenever I saw my friends win, I felt I could be the next winner. It gave me hope" (Respondent 005). This hope of winning kept many students engaged in betting activities. In essence, the promise of a potential win, amplified by peer success and advertising, created a powerful cycle of expectation and continued betting.

Humour was also identified as a key factor influencing betting habits. Respondents indicated that humorous elements in advertisements made the betting experience seem more enjoyable and helped reduce the stress or tension associated with betting. This emotional connection through humour contributed to their continued participation. Ultimately, humour served as a persuasive tool that not only attracted attention of the students but also normalized betting as a fun and socially acceptable activity.

In summary, both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews pointed to message appeals as a significant technique used by advertisers to attract students into sports betting. Winning was highlighted as a primary reason respondents engaged in betting, particularly focusing on the prospect of large financial rewards. Many respondents believed that winning once increased their confidence that they could win again. These findings echoed in the qualitative data where becoming a millionaire was also seen as the ultimate goal.

These findings aligned with existing literature. For example, Kunkel, Walker, and Hodge (2019) found that advertising appeals evoke positive emotional responses that satisfy consumers' psychological needs. Moreover, Harms, Bijmolt, and Hoekstra (2017) re-affirmed that consumers are more responsive to emotional content during the early stages of brand awareness and preference, while factual information later helps convert this interest into actual purchases. This stresses the importance of strategically sequencing emotional and rational appeals to effectively guide consumers along the decision-making process.

Regression Analysis

Table 3: Message Appeals and Sports Betting

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.387 ^a	.152	.149	.71967	1.126
2	.654 ^a	.431	.427	.59066	1.278

a. Predictors:(Constant), Message Appeals and Message Appeals*z(moderator) model 1 & 2

b. Dependent Variable: Sports Gambling

To assess whether message appeals significantly influenced sports gambling among university students in Nairobi County, a simple regression analysis was conducted. The initial results, without moderating variables, yielded an R-squared value of 0.152. This indicates that 15.2%

of sports betting could be explained by message appeals alone, as summarized in Table 4.45. However, when the moderating variable (media literacy) the R-squared value increased substantially to 0.431. This meant that, in the presence of the moderator, 43.0% of sports gambling was accounted for by message appeals.

The significant increase in explanatory power suggests that media literacy played a crucial moderating role, in enhancing the impact of message appeals on sports betting. This finding highlights the importance of equipping students with media literacy skills, as it will potentially change how they interpret and respond to persuasive gambling messages. The results underscore the need for targeted interventions that incorporate education on media literacy as a strategy to mitigate risky gambling behaviors driven by media influence. Table 3 provides the summary of the findings.

Table 4: ANOVA for Message Appeals

Model		Sum of Squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F	P-value
1	Regression	29.664	1	29.666	57.289	.000 ^b
	Residual	167.286	324	.519		
	Total	196.950	325			
2	Regression	84.612	2	42.308	121.280	.000 ^b
	Residual	112.338	322	.348		
	Total	196.950	324			

a. Dependent Variable: Sports Gambling

b. Predictors:(Constant), Message Appeals and Message Appeals*z(moderator) model 1& 2

Further analysis revealed that the overall regression models were statistically significant in both cases, when the moderator variable was not included and when it was. Specifically, in the first model (without the moderator), message appeals emerged as a strong explanatory variable for sports gambling behavior, with an F-value of 57.289 and a p-value of 0.000, which fell below the commonly accepted significance level of 0.05. This indicated that the relationship between message appeals and sports gambling was not due to random chance, and the model was acceptable for the data.

In the second model, which incorporated a moderator variable, the explanatory power of the model increased substantially. The F-value rose to 121.280, with a p-value that remained constant at 0.000, confirming a statistically significant relationship. This suggested that the inclusion of the moderator not only retained the significance of message appeals as a predictor but also strengthened the model's overall explanatory capability.

Together, these results imply that both models; whether with or without the moderator, were statistically robust and suitable for explaining the influence of message appeals on sports gambling behavior. The improved performance of the model with the moderator also pointed to the moderating variable playing a meaningful role in shaping this relationship. A summary of these results are presented in table 4 above.

Table 5: Coefficients for Message Appeals

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	P-value
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.290	.178		24.119	.000
	Message Appeals	.331	.044	.388	7.568	.000
2	(Constant)	2.764	.190		14.536	.000
	Message Appeals	.171	.054	.201	3.183	.000
	Message Appeals*z	.875	.070	.791	12.550	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sports Gambling

The relationship between message appeals and sports gambling was analyzed using regression analysis. The resulting regression equation, in the absence of a moderator, was expressed as:

$$Y = 4.290 + 0.331X$$

In this model, Y represents the level of engagement in sports gambling, and X denotes the intensity of message appeals. The coefficient 0.331 indicates that for every one-unit increase in message appeal, there is a corresponding increase of 0.331 units in sports gambling behavior among university students. This suggests that stronger or more persuasive message appeals are positively associated with a higher likelihood of participating in sports gambling. When a moderating variable was introduced into the model, the regression equation summarised to:

$$Y = 2.764 + 0.171X + 0.875(X \times Z)$$

Here, Z represents the moderator variable (which could be a factor like peer influence, emotional susceptibility, or prior gambling experience), and $X \times Z$ denotes the interaction between the message appeals and the moderator. In this moderated model, the coefficient for message appeals alone dropped slightly to 0.171, suggesting a reduced direct effect. However, the interaction term's coefficient of 0.875 indicates a substantial amplifying effect, meaning that the influence of message appeals on gambling behavior increases significantly when moderated by the interacting variable.

Furthermore, the p-values in both models were less than 0.05, ascertaining that the relationships were statistically significant. This meant that message appeals had a meaningful impact on sports betting among university students in Nairobi Kenya.

These findings were consistent with research by Osnat and Ilan (2017), who found out that the simplicity and clarity of sports game rules enhanced fans' perceived expertise. This perceived competence was reinforced by their constant exposure to sports-related information, fostering a deeper emotional attachment. As a result, advertisers often choose to craft emotionally charged message appeals; emphasizing excitement, belonging, or urgency, rather than relying on rational or factual arguments. Emotional appeals tend to be more compelling in influencing betting behaviors, especially among young and engaged sports audiences.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of message appeals on sports betting among the university students in Kenya. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that advertising messages had a significant impact on betting activities among university students. Based on descriptive analysis, the study found out that humour appeals resonated well with the students who engaged in betting. This technique was effective as it

helped to grab the attention of the students any time it used by the advertisers. One of the most effective techniques that was favourable among students was that of direct comparison. Messages emphasizing the small amount of money required to place a bet compared to the large potential winnings emerged as a key factor driving widespread betting behavior among students. Consequently, when a message implied that “others were winning” or “others were smarter for betting,” this kind of notion triggered a psychological need not to be left behind. This technique was effective into tapping into both fear of missing out and competitive social dynamics, particularly strong in youth and peer-driven environments like universities. In this case therefore, the, direct comparison messaging did not just present a choice but rather presented frames that failing to bet was a loss or social disadvantage. Most students were motivated by the hope of becoming millionaires.

The highest mean score recorded was 4.27. This was where the respondents believed that a single win reinforced expectations of future wins. Consequently, the high mean (4.13) for relating loses to advertising messages implied that advertisers could exploit psychological biases for instance sunk cost fallacy where individuals could continue with betting activities with the expectations of recovering them through a significant win. These findings echoed the work of Kunkel et, al. (2019) and Harms et, al. (2017), who found out that emotional and personalized advertising was particularly influential among younger demographics. The study confirms that such appeals not only gained attention but also drove behavior by shaping perceptions of control, reward, and risk.

On whether participation in betting was informed by advertising messages, the study found out that 78.5% of the respondents engaged in betting activities as a result of advertisements. This higher number supported the hypothesis that message appeals had a significant influence on sports betting. In addition, the qualitative insights re-affirmed the same. Themes such as amount, attention, millionaire and humour emerged as the key motivators that were shaped by advertising contents. Psychologically, humour reduces tension or resistance to persuasive messaging by lowering the audience's cognitive defences. It puts one in a relaxed emotional state thus making an individual less likely analyse and evaluate the risks that are associated with betting. The peripheral route of persuasion, as explained by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), bypasses logical scrutiny and instead relies on emotional engagement. By doing so, humour can easily trivialize the consequences of gambling, portraying it as entertainment rather than a financial or psychological risk. This pattern helps explain why students may persist in betting behaviour despite frequent losses, as emotional appeals and peer influence can override rational decision-making.

Further, a linearity test using correlation coefficients confirmed that there was a strong relationship between message appeals and sports betting. The first model which was conducted in the absence of the moderator (media literacy) indicated that 15.2% of the sports betting was informed by message appeals. Consequently, when the moderating variable (media literacy) was introduced, the model's explanatory power was increased to 43.1%, an indication that media literacy played a role in students betting patterns. The regression coefficient further provided a positive coefficient of 0.875 implying that the more an individual was not familiar with the media the more impactful the message became. These findings were in tandem with Osnat and Ilan, (2017), who found out that vulnerability to persuasive messages was often reinforced by emotional engagement and low awareness of underlying marketing tactics.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) was employed in this study as a theoretical lens to help in interpreting the findings. It aided in understanding how persuasive messages influenced

attitudes and behaviours of the respondents. In the application of the central route, which involves careful and thoughtful consideration of the arguments presented in a message (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). The study found out that this path could only be activated when the audience were both motivated and able to process the information, leading to more enduring attitude change based on the quality of the message content. Those involved in this study failed to apply this. In contrast, the peripheral route involves less cognitive effort and relies on external cues, such as visual appeal, humour, celebrity endorsements, emotional tone, or message repetition. This route clearly influenced individuals who were either unmotivated or unable to engage in deep message processing, resulting in more temporary or superficial attitude change.

The advertisements targeting university students, peripheral cues in this case deliberately chose to bypass critical thinking and appeal to emotions among them. These cues made betting appear like a socially accepted activity with minimal perceived psychological risk. All these fancy techniques masked the true financial or psychological problems of betting. Consequently, the central route of persuasion such as detailed likelihood explanations or responsible betting messages were less prominent and less effective in emotionally charged advertising environments. ELM thus demonstrated how sports betting advertisements strategically appealed to young audiences using peripheral cues. The advertisers capitalised on the gambler's susceptibility to emotional and peer-driven influences rather than encouraging rational evaluation of betting risks.

While this study offers meaningful insights, several limitations were identified. Firstly, the study used university-based sample which could introduce sample bias, as the findings may not generalize to non-student populations or older adults who engage in sports betting. Secondly, because the data was self-reported there could a possibility of bias or errors due to the sensitive nature of betting. Respondents may have underreported or misrepresented their betting habits due to fear or ignorance. Thirdly, whereas the mixed-methods approach provided depth and breadth, the cross-sectional design could have limited the ability to observe changes in behaviour over time, future studies could address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal designs to track behavioural change. This could be attained by using experimental methods to test specific message appeals in controlled environments. The study could as well expand the demographic scope to include a broader range of age groups.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study arrived at a conclusion that message appeal had a significant influence on betting patterns among university students in Kenya. How the message was structured affected the purchasing powers of the consumers. Messages that were emotionally framed, in terms of humour or with unrealistic promises carried the day. These messages did not only capture attention but also shaped the beliefs and opinion of students who engaged in betting.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study recommends the following;

1. The finds of this study calls on greater regulatory oversight on sports betting advertisements that target the youth.
2. The government support the needy study to safeguard them from engaging in betting.

3. Advertisements promoting betting activities should clearly communicate the risks and potential dangers of addictive sports betting.

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