

Executive Summary:

The Appeal of Celebrity Ambassadors to Children & Young People Aged 11-17

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GambleAware

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

This executive summary outlines the findings from a research project to explore Children and Young People's (CYP¹) attitudes towards the use of celebrity ambassadors in gambling advertising. The full results are available in the accompanying report which you can find on the GambleAware website. The researchers on this study are Nicki Karet, founder and Managing Director of specialist children's research agency Sherbert working alongside Jo Perkins and Hanna Chalmers of The Culture Studio.

In 2023, the UK Government Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) published a White Paper titled High Stakes: Gambling Reform for the Digital Age² which marked the largest proposed changes to policy and regulation in the gambling sector since the 2005 Gambling Act. The White Paper maintains that whilst exposure to gambling via advertising is widespread amongst CYP, neither this nor the subsequent normalisation of gambling are inherently problematic due to a lack of robust evidence of a causal relationship between advertising and (potential) harm.

GambleAware feels that a lack of greater regulation on gambling advertising and marketing is a missed opportunity, particularly in regard to protecting CYP, and have called for further restriction in this domain.³ This sentiment has been echoed by leading academics⁴ and parliamentarians⁵ who believe that the "government should have taken a more precautionary approach to gambling advertising in general – particularly to minimise children's exposure". A recent study⁶ gathered widespread consensus from international experts on effective interventions to prevent gambling harms, with many interventions being related to tighter regulations on marketing. This works by reducing exposure to products linked with harm to everyone in the population, rather than focusing responsibility on individuals to take extra precautions.

Here, it is the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) who are responsible for reviewing any complaints brought, working as the frontline regulator⁷ under contract with Ofcom. In doing so they refer to the Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP)/CAP code⁸ which, after a recent change, now states that that individuals who are *'likely to be of strong appeal to young children or persons, especially by reflecting or being associated with youth culture'* should not be ambassadors, including those *'whose example is likely to be followed'*.

GambleAware feels this is too limited, with many individuals considered 'low risk' by the guidelines potentially having far greater reach and appeal amongst CYP than perhaps anticipated.⁹ What's

¹ We refer to Children and Young People aged 11-17 as CYP throughout this report

² High Stakes: Gambling Reform in the Digital Age [High Stakes: Gambling Reform for the Digital Age](#)

³ Gambling marketing in Great Britain: What needs to change and why?

<https://www.gambleaware.org/media/aq2jasd1/gambling-marketing-in-great-britain-what-needs-to-change.pdf>

⁴ 'No evidence of harm' implies no evidence of safety: Framing the lack of causal evidence in gambling advertising research <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/add.16369>

⁵ MPs call for cut to football gambling adverts to shield children from exposure

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/378/culture-media-and-sport-committee/news/199092/mps-call-for-cut-to-football-gambling-adverts-to-shield-children-from-exposure/>

⁶ Policies and interventions to reduce harmful gambling: an international Delphi consensus and implementation study [Policies and interventions to reduce harmful gambling: an international Delphi consensus and implementation rating study](#)

⁷ ASA guidance on advertising rules for gambling ads <https://www.asa.org.uk/topic/gambling.html>

⁸ <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/tough-new-rules-to-curb-broad-appeal-of-gambling-ads-and-better-protect-under-18s.html>

⁹ The effect of marketing and advertising on children, young people and vulnerable people Quantitative Research Report https://www.gambleaware.org/our-research/publication-library/articles/the-effect-of-marketing-and-advertising-on-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-people-quantitative-research-report/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22332012196&gbraid=0AAAApZApDGSew-6BtwC-

more, GambleAware suggests the term ‘appeal’ may be too restrictive – for example, it may be that the use of individuals who are respected/trusted, if not hugely ‘popular’, is sufficient to encourage the view amongst CYP that gambling is a harmless activity.

This study on the appeal of celebrity ambassadors to children and young people was therefore commissioned to support two of GambleAware’s key outcomes¹⁰ among CYP:

1. Preventing gambling harm
2. Preventing escalation of that harm

Whilst this particular project does not explore the *direct* causal link to harm, the intention is to add to the body of evidence in this area, to hear directly from CYP and ultimately to reduce the overall level of risk for all CYP.

Within this context, the overarching objective for this research study was to:

Build evidence on the extent to which specific ambassadors/celebrities are trusted and appeal to CYP, and the likely impact of this on future gambling behaviour. In addition, build further evidence around the online experience of CYP and their perception of gambling marketing.

The findings of the research provide more understanding and evidence on the use of celebrity ambassadors in gambling advertising and their appeal amongst CYP. This will enable policy makers, such as the ASA, to make evidence-led decisions relating to the use of celebrities, to reduce risk and prevent harm among CYP.

Whilst GambleAware funded the research, the research was carried out independently. All findings and views expressed are those of the authors, and GambleAware did not determine or influence the results or findings.

2. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There were three phases of research:

Phase one: A selective literature review of recent and relevant academic papers in the specific area of children and gambling advertising, as well as academic work exploring the value and impact of celebrity endorsement to brands. This also included a review of the frameworks developed to explain how celebrity endorsement works to add value to brands and what kind of value it brings. The survey design and interpretation of the results in this study was informed by this review – focusing on how culture transmits meaning in advertising and how this works in relation to celebrity endorsement.

Phase two:¹¹ The core survey was then drafted, and a small number of 30-minute online interviews were conducted with 8 CYP to check for comprehension and engagement. Once refined, a sample of 2,100 online interviews were conducted, with the survey taking an average of 10-12 minutes to complete: 300 interviews were completed for each age from 11 to 17 years, with interlocking

[hJ_eVWs_2U_s&gclid=Cj0KCQjw5ubABhDIARIsAHMighahnn2x-oPM98ZmbI_rnvGPjH477Z2NTg91nNB5rBEx8wf3dSuQjIYaAtjBEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds](https://www.gambleaware.org/what-we-do/about-us/our-strategy/)

¹⁰ GambleAware Strategy <https://www.gambleaware.org/what-we-do/about-us/our-strategy/>

¹¹ Safeguarding concerns prevented us from using real or mocked-up gambling adverts in the survey. We couldn’t, for example, look at the appeal and potential impact of an advert with a well-known celebrity vs an unknown individual.

gender quotas. Broad quotas were also applied to ensure the final sample was representative of GB in terms of region, SEG and ethnicity.

Once consent was obtained (from both a parent/guardian and also the CYP) and quotas checked, each respondent was asked about two specific celebrities to establish familiarity i.e. whether they recognised the individual and how much they felt they knew about them (based on 3 photographs), levels of 'appeal' (across 12 alternative measures) and finally 8 potential outcomes/harms of seeing the individual in a gambling advert. The 2 celebrities were selected at random from a list of 10.

Celebrities included: Peter Crouch, Danny Dyer, Luke Littler, Lando Norris, Jake Paul, Micah Richards, Chris Rock, Jill Scott, Keir Starmer and Emma Willis.

They were selected to represent a range of celebrities currently present in popular culture, including some ruled by the ASA as not having 'strong appeal' to CYP, some currently representing gambling companies, some participating in sports regarded as 'low risk' by the ASA. The Prime Minister was also included as someone potentially recognisable and potentially more trusted than liked, whilst not associated with popular culture and specifically not associated with youth culture.

An experiment: A number of these celebrities were originally assumed to be beyond the sphere of current GB youth culture and perhaps therefore, unlikely to represent potential to harm CYP as gambling ambassadors. As such, for half of the sample the respondent was provided not only with 3 images for each of the celebrities, but also a name and short description: this was to act as a proxy to discussing them with family members/peers. Therefore, with half of the sample the full exercise was conducted based on the photographs alone (3 per celebrity) whilst the other half of the sample were shown the photographs as well as the name of the individual and a brief factual description of who they are and their notable characteristics and achievements.

The second part of the survey was then dedicated to exploring CYP's broader views on the use of celebrity ambassadors in gambling advertising and their recall of such adverts, including whether they had ever tempted them to gamble, as well as their participation in gambling-like in-game activities online.

Phase three: Finally, headline findings from the survey were then further explored qualitatively in 12x45 minute online 'friendship depths' (two friends) interviews: a total of 24 CYP aged 11-17 from all three GB nations. This stage was particularly valuable in that it enabled us to hear CYP's views on the subject in their own words.

3. KEY FINDINGS

I. Attitudes towards gambling and gambling advertising

Children and young people would like more education around gambling as well as greater regulatory protection

"I definitely agree that more should be done to teach young people because they think more about the thrill of gambling rather than the disadvantages to gambling and maybe debt too." Ayanna, 16
"I think the rules around gambling advertising should be a bit harsher. They're very good at finding ways around or ways to just slightly bend the rules. So, it's not illegal what they're doing". Rebecca, 17

- 86% of CYP aged 11-17 agree that 'more should be done to teach young people about the risks of gambling.'

- 79% agree that 'there should be more rules around gambling content/advertising on social media.
- 78% agree that 'nobody under the age of 18 should be exposed to content and advertising about gambling.'
- 56% agree they see too much content and advertising online about gambling.
- Around half (54% of boys, 44% of girls) reported undertaking gambling-like in-game activities in the previous month; yet 3 in every 4 (76%) agree that under 18s should not be exposed to these same activities.
- Three in four agree that gambling advertising makes gambling seem more fun (76%) and/or harmless/risk-free (73%).

II. Attitudes towards celebrities and celebrity endorsement in advertising

The majority of children and young people think that celebrities should not be allowed to promote gambling, often because it potentially normalises gambling and increases appeal.

"I feel like a lot of people put trust into them (celebrities in adverts) otherwise it's just some random person." Tayyibah, 16
"You would feel like they're trustworthy because they're famous and everyone knows them." Teddy, 12

- Two in three (67%) CYP agree that famous celebrities/individuals/influencers should NOT be allowed to promote gambling.
- A majority of CYP agree that having celebrities in gambling adverts is likely to make CYP:
 - Feel that 'gambling is fun' (64%) and/or 'exciting' (63%) and/or 'cool' (59%) and /or 'excited to try gambling' (57%).
 - Think 'gambling is something everyone does' (64%) and/or 'is an easy way to make money' (56%).
- More than 1 in 3 CYP in GB (37%) think they 'have seen/heard celebrities in gambling advertising'.
- One in 10 CYP (11%) say they have spent money gambling themselves after seeing a celebrity promoting/doing it, with 1 in 4 (25%) saying they have at least been tempted.
- However, this proportion does not remain uniform across the wider CYP. In fact it increases to more than 1 in 3 boys aged 16-17 (36%) and to half (52%) of those who know someone who has/has had a problem with gambling.

III. Specific celebrities – recognition levels and positive traits

Recognition of these 10 celebrities, based simply on 3 head-shot photographs, is (very) high – in many cases higher than anticipated. What's more, many are seen by CYP as possessing positive traits.

"I personally think it's a bad thing because a lot of younger people would have watched him as a role model ...I used to watch him when I was a child and because he was like a part of my growing up, I have more trust in what he says." Devvain, 17

- Amongst CYP in GB, there is widespread claimed recognition of the celebrities tested¹² several of whom have appeared in gambling advertisements e.g. 82% recognise Peter Crouch, 80% Danny Dyer, 76% Emma Willis.
- In fact, a substantial minority of CYP feel that they know quite a bit or even 'loads' about several of the celebrities tested in the survey e.g. Peter Crouch (30%), Danny Dyer (28%) and Luke Littler (27%).
- Many of the 10 celebrities were also felt to have positive traits by CYP e.g. 59% feel that Peter Crouch 'grabs your attention', 69% feel that he is 'cool' and 69% feel that he is 'funny/entertaining.'
- N.B. The experiment (with half of the sample seeing *only* the 3 pictures of celebrities and the other half also provided with written text to serve as a proxy for family/peers building knowledge of the celebrity) made little difference to the results.¹³

IV. Celebrities in gambling advertisements – potential harm

Many CYP believe that the inclusion of such celebrities in advertising can positively impact their perceptions of gambling regardless of whether they have 'strong appeal' or not, potentially therefore causing harm.

"You might look at that advert (Peter Crouch) and think well he's putting bets on the game, so I should too" Rebecca, 16

- For 9 of 10 celebrities looked at, around half of CYP agree that including them in gambling adverts would make them feel that gambling is *fun* e.g. 54% Chris Rock, 50% Peter Crouch, 48% Jake Paul.
- For all 10 celebrities, a substantial proportion agree that seeing them in a gambling advert would make them think that gambling is something everyone does (39%-47%), in other words, *normalising gambling*. And many agree that their inclusion makes gambling seem exciting (45% on average) and/or that it is an easy way to make money (38% on average).
- Even when CYP said that they *didn't* 'like' a particular celebrity, this didn't necessarily negate the potential for harm. For example, if they 'trust' this same celebrity, feel they are 'cool' or 'attractive', a substantial proportion agree that seeing them in adverts would make gambling seem fun/exciting/something everyone does, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Hearing the voices of children and young people (CYP) from around Great Britain in relation to the use of celebrity ambassadors in gambling advertisements is a first, and their experiences and attitudes make for strong reading. CYP recognise the potential for harm as a result of seeing celebrity ambassadors in gambling adverts: large numbers agreed that their inclusion encourages a more positive view of gambling amongst their peers. And a majority of CYPs seek both more education and greater regulation in this area.

¹³ In part, perhaps due to higher levels of recognition than anticipated i.e. descriptions often told them little that they did not already know. Couple with assumptions CYP are making e.g. all 'celebrities' are relatively famous/wealthy etc.. It may be the case that if we had used more colloquial/emotive descriptions (more akin to a conversation with family/friends) we would have seen a greater difference.

This research has demonstrated that celebrities assumed to exist outside of core 'youth culture' are in fact well-recognised. Many CYP have already been exposed to gambling adverts utilising celebrity ambassadors and were able to recall them in this research.

The study also reveals that celebrities do not have to be 'liked' in order to be engaging – other dimensions of 'appeal' are sufficient e.g. a celebrity that is considered 'attractive', 'trusted' or 'cool' can make gambling seem fun/exciting/something everyone does. As such, the term 'strong appeal' needs to be interpreted more broadly. i.e. not simply judging celebrities based on how much they appear to be liked by CYP.

Furthermore, the current **high/moderate/low risk definitions in the CAP code** and currently used by regulators such as the ASA are insufficient given that there is, in fact, considerable interest in sports such as boxing, Formula One and darts, particularly amongst boys.

In fact, within the broad CYP demographic it seems that certain sub-groups are more at risk (whilst none are exempt). Whilst boys of all ages tend to be more engaged with a wide variety of sports and sports personalities, they are also more likely to report participating in gambling-like gaming activities compared with their female peers. This suggests that older teenage boys may be particularly vulnerable to the influence of celebrity endorsements, reinforcing the need for targeted safeguards within this high-risk subgroup.

These findings suggest that the current approach - focusing only on avoiding celebrities seen as having a 'strong appeal' to young people - is too limited to effectively prevent serious harm. They also indicate that more complaints to the ASA should be upheld. The research demonstrates that across the range of celebrities tested they are more recognised by CYP than anticipated. As celebrities they are perceived by this audience to have a range of positive attributes that increases the risk of harm if they are to act as ambassadors to gambling brands.

This research examined the presence of celebrity ambassadors in gambling advertising through a *cultural* lens - the meaning of specific celebrities in British culture as understood by CYP and how their presence in gambling advertising may influence or inform their views and attitudes towards gambling. Further research in this area could explore how the stages of psychological development that children and young people go through, inform and shape their understanding and engagement with celebrities in gambling advertising.

"I get this feeling when someone who is famous, you kind of get that trust in them. And even though they are getting probably paid a lot, it's probably more convincing or like cool to see. I'd rather watch an ad with a celebrity in it, because it's more like interesting to see than just a normal person. But if you see someone you know, you'd be like, oh, I know that person, and even if you don't like them, you probably watch more of that than a normal person." Xavier, 13