

## **Personality Traits as Predictors of Athlete Branding among Elite Players in Nigeria Premier Football League**

**<sup>1</sup>Blessing C. EKWE**

*ceybarts@gmail.com*

*09021524948 & 07037887402*

**&**

**<sup>2</sup>Esther M. OLADEJO**

*Lead City University, Ibadan*

*Faculty of Education*

*<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Kinesiology, Sports Science and Health Education*

*Oladejo.esther@lcu.edu.ng*

*08025959694*

### **Abstract**

*Diverse organisations have steadily used branding as a tool to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors in recent times. This study examined personality traits as predictors of athlete branding among elite players in the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL). The aim was to explore athlete branding among players in the NPFL. The descriptive research design was used. Population comprised all NPFL players. Three hundred and forty NPFL players were sampled. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Two self-developed and validated instruments were used for data collection. Personality Trait Scale (PTS), and Football Player Branding Scale (FPBS). The reliability coefficients were PTS (0.93), and FPBS (0.85) respectively. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse demographic data while multiple regression*

*was used to analyse the hypotheses. The study revealed that there was a significant joint prediction of leadership and charisma on athlete branding among respondents ( $F_{(2,337)}=99.300$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). There was a significant relative prediction of leadership ( $\beta=0.213$ ,  $t=3.568$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and charisma ( $\beta=0.441$ ,  $t=7.337$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) on athlete branding. The study concluded that personality traits predicted athlete branding. Recommendations included, NPFL clubs and coaches should foster leadership and charisma in players through trainings, workshops and personality development programmes. In addition, players should be encouraged to take leadership roles, thereby enhancing brand perception.*

**Keywords:** Personality Traits, Branding, Charisma, Elite Players, Leadership

## **Introduction**

In recent times, diverse organisations have steadily used branding as a tool to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. Branding is the creation, development, and management of a distinct identity for products, services, corporations, and an individual's perception and emotional connection with the target audience. According to Constantin, Stanescu and Stanescu (2020), branding enables businesses, individuals, and companies to stand out in a competitive market by fostering trust and credibility. Recently, football players have become more influential outside of their sport by participating in a range of social events and commercial ventures. England football duo Marcus Rashford and Raheem Sterling are active in social justice campaigns, with Rashford advocating on matchdays and Sterling promoting it through a TV ad with Gillette sponsors (BBC, 2021). Nigerian player Kalu Nwankwo has a marketing agreement with UNICEF and runs the Kanu Heart Foundation. Ivorian footballer Didier Drogba donated all his earnings from his partnership with Pepsi to charity, and Ghanaian Michael Essien established a foundation for poor communities (GOAL, 2010). These

organisations, through their social roles and partnerships with professional footballers, have significantly increased public awareness of these football icons.

Athlete branding is the deliberate process of designing, overseeing, and profiting from an elite athlete's brand (Adamson, 2021). Athlete branding also leverages a sports icon's ability to promote a product through sponsorships, endorsements, and collaborative campaigns, gaining financial advantage and brand recognition (Adamson, 2021). In 2017, Messi's Adidas sponsorship deal was worth \$500,000, and in 2024, it has increased to a massive \$25 million per year (DailyStar, 2023).

Elite football players with strong brands and meaningful messages attract businesses and capitalise on their brand value in their post-athletic careers (Hasaan, Javani, Fişne and Sato, 2020). Researchers highlight the benefits of comparing elite footballers to brands, highlighting their potential to diversify industries and utilise their athletic careers for other endeavours (Qi, Sajadi, Baghaei, Rezaei, and Li, 2024). The intriguing nexus of sports, culture, and business is represented by athlete branding among elite football players in Nigeria (Yar'Adua, Msughter and Aliyu, 2023). Elite players can use their distinctive attributes, achievements, and personalities to establish a unique identity that resonates with fans, sponsors, and stakeholders (Mobberley and Vredenburg, 2023). Elite football players are often portrayed as personified products, often used as brands or props in commercials or product endorsements (GOAL, 2010). According to Farzin, Sadeghi, Fattahi and Eghbal, (2020), Footballers' brand management is crucial for partnerships, benefiting sponsors from stakeholder factors like subscription and willingness influence on brand choice, marketing effectiveness, and helpful verbal advertising. Personality traits, such as leadership and charisma, play a pivotal role in athlete branding by shaping the unique identity and appeal of elite players. These traits influence not only the perception of athletes as role models and leaders but also their marketability and connection

with fans, sponsors, and stakeholders. By leveraging leadership qualities and charisma, athletes can build compelling brands that resonate across social, cultural, and commercial domains.

Football players' personality traits according to Ireland, (2021) are crucial for their success as brand endorsers, often leveraging their image for marketing and to secure profitable contracts. Footballers require effective branding strategies due to potential hazards, as consumers perceive them as human brands with distinctive personalities (Carlson and Donovan, 2013). The assessment of a footballer's identity is influenced by their status and uniqueness, according to Carlson and Donovan, 2013). Elite players' affiliations with specific teams and leagues naturally influence their brand (Su, Baker, Doyle and Kunkel, 2020). Furthermore, effective branding can enhance elite players' status as national heroes and role models, thereby boosting their influence both on and off the field (Ireland, 2021). Football players from renowned teams according to Su, Baker, Doyle and Yan, (2020), are often featured in the media, establishing their brand and making them suitable for partnerships and sponsorships. Examples are Victor Osimhen, Ademola Lookman, and Victor Boniface who are prominent footballers and are branded by public perception of their personalities, leadership attributes, and charisma (Carpenter, Shelton and Schroeder, 2023).

Personality traits according to Sirojev, (2023), refer to the roles and personas that players assume both on and off the field. These include leadership qualities and charisma. Elite football players can foster community engagement by fostering cultural connections with the local audience (Jacobson, 2020). Elite athletes, like Kanu Nwankwo, Michael Essien, and Didier Drogba, became demigods or national heroes through their philanthropic activities (Kunkel, Doyle and Na, 2020). Similarly, European players like Raheem Sterling and Marcus Rashford's involvement in social justice initiatives, using TV commercials and Gillette sponsors to promote causes during games resonate with fans and sponsors (GOAL, 2010) social position, life experiences, and

relationships with teammates, coaches, and opponents influence a player's leadership qualities, and charisma, which influence talent identification, popularity, and worth, which attracts companies (Larkin, Thorsten, Feichtinger, Höner and Oliver, 2023).

Leadership according to Loyens, Claringbould, Rossem and Van Eekeren (2022), is described as integrity in high regard. Like supporters everywhere, Nigerians highly value players with integrity, both on and off the field, viewing them as role models and having a positive brand image. Therefore, elite players in Nigeria need to uphold integrity to establish a robust and enduring brand. Elite football players are highly regarded for their leadership traits, which have a big influence on their popularity as a brand. Nigerian football players are frequently viewed as powerful and authoritative individuals when they exhibit leadership qualities on the pitch, such as when they captain their club or country (Ogbah, 2022). Football players with leadership qualities according to Richard, (2020), can use their brand to impact and support social causes, uplift colleagues, energise supporters and promote perseverance, teamwork, fair play, and resilience.

Charisma is the irresistible charm, assurance, and attraction displayed by certain sportsmen, both on and off the field, to capture the hearts of fans. For instance, Ronaldo's charismatic celebration “suiii” is being emulated by fans and other Nigerian football players worldwide, demonstrating the power of charisma in captivating and impacting audiences. Players with charismatic personalities often become influential influencers, endorsers, and fan favourites, establishing legendary brands on various platforms, including social media, beyond their sporting achievements (Blumberg and Markovits, 2021).

There are fewer studies on joint and relative factors that foretell athlete branding, including those involving personality traits (leadership and Charisma). Therefore, this study investigated personality traits as predictors of athlete branding among elite players in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Athlete branding in Nigeria is a popular phenomenon, with organisations like Eunisell, NairaBet, Bet9ja, and Owu, among others, partnering with NPFL teams. However, there seems to be a shift towards artists and other persons in the entertainment industry, with celebrities enjoying sports branding deals, unlike NPFL players who are equally popular and influential (Pulse Nigeria, 2024). Yet, music stars appear to be preferred by sports brands. There are no known records of a stronger template for sponsorships from the league body that may boost the chances of the players getting branding deals. Additionally, the roles of elite football players to maximise their marketability to attract branding deals in the ever-changing professional football ecosystem are limited so footballers may lack knowledge and help in building and developing their brands (Kester, 2024). Based on the aforementioned, this study investigated personality traits as predictors of athlete branding among elite players in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and analysed at 0.05 alpha level:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant joint prediction of personality traits (leadership and charisma) and athlete branding among elite players in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relative prediction of leadership, charisma and athlete branding among elite players in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research adopted the descriptive research design.

### **Participants**

The population of this study consisted all six hundred (600) elite football players in the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL).

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The sample size for this study was 340 NPFL players. Ten (10) out of twenty (20) registered teams from the 2019/2020 to 2023/2024 seasons respectively were purposively selected. Furthermore, NPFL Clubs that have remained in the top 10 team category from each season (2019/2020 to 2023/2024) were selected for this study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select ten (10) NPFL players from each top (10) NPFL team that were selected from the 2019/2020 season to the 2023/2024 season. Totalling 340 NPFL players. The inclusion criteria were based on the highest cumulative assists made, goals scored and achievements of the players. The respondents were active NPFL players within the five seasons that were selected. Players who have switched teams within the NPFL were included provided that, they meet the inclusion criteria. Additionally, Players provided informed consent for participation in the research, ensuring their willingness and ability to engage in study procedures. The exclusion criteria for this study included players who were not top five assist makers and goal scorers in the NPFL and players who were unwilling or unable to provide informed consent for participation in the study. These allows for the deliberate selection of respondents who meet specific criteria, such as top five assist makers, and top five goal scorers, thereby ensuring that the sample comprises individuals who are most relevant to the objectives of the study.

### **Instrumentation**

A self-developed and validated questionnaire was used for the study. The questionnaire was made up of three sections, namely; sections A, B, and C. Section A was used to obtain information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Three items were generated and responded to by the respondents. The items that were covered in this section include age, years of experience in the NPFL and position. Section B was used to gather information from respondents on personality traits of leadership and charisma. Leadership factor has 6 items, while charisma has 9 items. Section C was used to gather information from respondents on athlete branding. It has 15 items. Each response was scored on a 4-point modified Likert format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

### **Procedure for the Study**

The study used a quantitative research design to examine how personal traits and athlete branding are interconnected among elite Nigerian Premier Football League players. From a total population of 360 players, 340 were selected using purposive sampling to ensure accurate club representation. Data were gathered via a structured, validated questionnaire measuring leadership and charisma. High reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha above 0.93. The analysis involved descriptive statistics, multiple regression, offering a robust understanding of how personality traits and performance influence athlete branding.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the completed copies of the research instrument. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were analysed with the use of descriptive statistics of frequency, counts, and percentages. Regression was used to test hypotheses 1-2. All the hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Table 1: Demographic Data of Players**

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	18-20 Years	100	29.4%
	21-23 Years	85	25.0%
	24 years and above	155	45.6%
		<b>340</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Years of Experience</b>	1-5 Years	251	73.8%
	6-10 Years	85	25.0%
	11 Years & Above	4	1.2%
		<b>340</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Players' Positions</b>	Defender	9	2.6%
	Midfielder	75	22.1%
	Attacker	256	75.6%
<b>Total</b>		<b>340</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Survey (2024)

Table 4.1 shows that 100(29.4%) of respondents were between 18-20 years old, 85 (25.0%) were between 21-23 years of age, and 155(45.6%). It can be seen that most of the players were between 24 years and above. Table 1 further shows the years of experience of players in NPFL, 251 (73.8%) players had 1-5 years of experience in NPFL, 85 (25.0%) had 6-10 years of experience and 4(1.2%) had 11 years and above experience in NPFL. This implies that most of the players had 1-5 years of experience in NPFL. Players' positions can also be seen in Table 1, 9(2.6%) of the respondents were defenders, 75 (22.1%) were midfielders and 256(75.3%) were attackers. This means that most of the respondents were midfielders.

### Hypotheses Testing

**H<sub>0</sub>I:** There is no significant joint prediction of personality traits (leadership and charisma) on athlete branding among elite football players in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

**Table 2: Joint Prediction of Personality Traits on Athlete Branding among Elite Football Players in Nigeria Premier Football League.**

R=.609						
R <sup>2</sup> =.371						
Adj. R <sup>2</sup> =.367						
Std. Error=5.66070						
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)	Remark
Regression	6363.840		3181.920	99.30	.000	Significant
Residual	10798.663	2	32.044	0		
Total	17162.503	33				
		7				
		33				
		9				

**Source:** Field Survey 2024

As shown in Table 4.4, it was found that the linear combination of personality traits (leadership and charisma) tested significantly on athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL ( $F_{2,337} = 99.300, p < 0.05$ ). The result yielded a coefficient of multiple regression of  $R = 0.609$  and multiple R-square of 0.371. The result also reveals that adjusted  $R^2 = 0.367$  linear combination of personality traits (leadership and

charisma) tested significantly on athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL; indicating that about 60.9% of variance was accounted for by the independent variables. This means that, personality traits leadership and charisma jointly and significantly determined athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relative prediction of leadership and charisma on athlete branding among elite football players in the Nigeria Premier Football League.

**Table 3:**  
**Relative Prediction of Personal Factors on Athlete Branding among Elite Football Players in Nigeria Premier Football League**

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.	Remark
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
RR (Constant)	16.950	2.702			6.274	.000	
Leadership	.518	.145	.213		3.568	.000	Sig.
Charisma	.801	.109	.441		7.377	.000	Sig.

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4.5 reveals leadership and charisma the unstandardised regression weight ( $\beta$ ), the standardized error of estimate ( $SE\beta$ ), the standardized coefficient, the t-ratio and the level at which the t-ratio was significant. As indicated in Table 4.5, leadership, ( $\beta=0.213$ ,  $t=3.568$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and charisma ( $\beta=0.441$ ,  $t=7.377$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) independently tested significantly on athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL. However, charisma had a higher contribution to athlete branding than leadership. This means that leadership and charisma relatively and

significantly determined athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study on socio-demographic characteristics of elite players revealed that most of the players were 24 years old and above, most of the players had 1-5 years of playing experience in NPFL and most of the respondents were midfield players. Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that the linear combination of personality traits (leadership and charisma) tested significantly on athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL. This means that personality traits of leadership and charisma jointly and significantly predicted athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL.

The findings of this study on charisma and athlete branding were in line with studies of Arnould and Dion (2023) who found that charismatic legitimacy is maintained over time by charismatic traits that help future brand leaders inherit charismatic traits and behaviours. It is also in agreement with the studies of Giloi, Marquez and Xavier (2022) which demonstrated that charismatic leaders can influence their followers through emotional involvement and symbolic representation and that charisma plays a critical role in legitimising authority.

Similarly, the findings were in line with a study by Toode (2020), who found that charismatic leaders can modify their approach depending on the cultural setting, which increases their attractiveness and efficacy; relatively, charismatic athletes can use their charm to forge closer bonds with their supporters. It also aligned with the studies of Kunkel, Biscaia, Arai and Agyemang (2019) who found that charisma plays a significant role in athlete branding, with fans attributing leadership qualities to players they perceive as charismatic.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that personality traits (leadership and charisma) jointly and significantly predicted athlete branding among elite football players in NPFL.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. NPFL clubs and coaches should foster leadership and charisma in players through training workshops, and personality development programmes.
2. Players should be encouraged to take leadership roles, thereby enhancing brand perception.
3. Clubs should invest in media training, public speaking workshops and mentorship to develop players' charisma and leadership qualities, thereby, enhancing their brand and promoting fan engagement.

## **References**

- Adamson, A. C. (2021). A brand new game: A phenomenological study of how student-athletes and mentors are managing personal branding (Doctoral dissertation). The University of Alabama.
- Arnould, E., & Dion, D. (2023). Brand dynasty: Managing charismatic legitimacy over time. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 39(3-4), 338-366.
- BBC. (2021). Sport. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/58861327>
- Blumberg, Z., & Markovits, A. S. (2021). American soccer at a crossroad: MLS's struggle between the exigencies of traditional American sports culture and the expectations of the global soccer community. *Soccer & Society*, 22(3), 231-247.

- Carlson, B. D., & Donavan, D. T. (2013). Human brands in sport: Athlete brand personality and identification. *Journal of Sport Management*, 27(3), 193-206
- Carpenter, J. P., Shelton, C. C., & Schroeder, S. E. (2023). The education influencer: A new player in the educator professional landscape. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 55(5), 749-764.
- Constantin, P. N., Stanescu, R., & Stanescu, M. (2020). Social entrepreneurship and sport in Romania: How can former athletes contribute to sustainable social change? *Sustainability*, 12(11), 46-88.
- DailyStar. (2023). Lionel Messi Adidas lifetime deal. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/sport/football/lionel-messi-adidas-lifetime-deal-30843244>.
- Hasaan, A., Javani, V., Fişne, M., & Sato, S. (2020). Athlete branding in less popular sport: A triadic approach. *PODIUM Sport, Leisure and Tourism Review*, 9(4), 70-96.
- Farzin, M., Sadeghi, M., Fattahi, M., & Eghbal, M. R. (2020). Effect of social media marketing and eWOM on willingness to pay in detailing: Mediating role of brand equity and brand identity. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 10(3), 327-343.
- Giloi, E., & Marquez, X. (2022). Charisma and authority. In *Staging Authority*. De Gruyter, 27-50.
- GOAL. (2010). African footballers with a social conscience. Retrieved from <https://www.goal.com/en-ng/news/ten-african-footballers-with-a-social-conscience/blta50cc4299a64a14d>
- Ireland, R. (2021). Commercial determinants of health in sport: The example of the English Premier League (Doctoral dissertation). University of Glasgow.
- Jacobson, J. (2020). You are a brand: Social media managers' branding and the future audience. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 29(6), 715-727.

- Kester, E. (2024). Assessment of athlete brand identity: A preliminary investigation. Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/research\\_symp/2024/posters/15/](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/research_symp/2024/posters/15/)
- Kunkel, T., Biscaia, R., Arai, A., & Agyemang, K. (2019). The role of self-brand connection on the relationship between athlete brand image and fan outcomes. *Journal of Sport Management*.
- Kunkel, T., Doyle, J., & Na, S. (2020). Becoming more than an athlete: Developing an athlete's brand using strategic philanthropy. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22(3), 358–378.
- Larkin, P., Thorsten, L., Feichtinger, P., Höner, O. (2023). Talent identification and development in sport and exercise psychology: Theory and application. Springer International Publishing.
- Loyens, K., Claringbould, I., Rossem, L. H. V., & Van Eekeren, F. (2022). The social construction of integrity: A qualitative case study in Dutch football. *Sport in Society*, 25(9), 1714-1733.
- Mobberley, L., & Vredenburg, J. (2023). Athlete endorsement and the business of sports amid COVID-19: Lessons from a digital media consumption enquiry. In *Digital Marketing in Sports* (pp. 199-216). Routledge.
- Ogbah, J. P. (2022). Supervised autonomy and its impact on Nigerian sports (Doctoral dissertation). Loughborough University.
- Pulse Nigeria. (2019). Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.pulsesports.ng/football/competition/npl254/statistics/2019-5888>.
- Qi, Y., Sajadi, S. M., Baghaei, S., Rezaei, R., & Li, W. (2024). Digital technologies in sports: Opportunities, challenges, and strategies for safeguarding athlete wellbeing and competitive integrity in the digital era. *Technology in Society*, 102, 496.
- Richard, J. (2020). Student-athletes and leadership: A case study of the impact of collegiate athletics on social change behaviour and leadership development (Doctoral dissertation). University of Southern California.

- Su, Y., Baker, B., Doyle, J. P., & Kunkel, T. (2020). Rise of an athlete brand: Factors influencing the social media following of athletes. *Faculty/Researcher Works*.
- Su, Y., Baker, B. J., Doyle, J. P., & Yan, M. (2020). Fan engagement in 15 seconds: Athletes' relationship marketing during a pandemic via TikTok. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 13(3), 436-446.
- Sirojev, S. (2023). Studying sports psychology. *American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Research*, 3(12), 176-188.
- Toode, Ü. (2020). Charismatic leaders in a new perspective: Reality in Estonia & Italy. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 8(1).
- Yar'Adua, S. M., Msughte, A. E., & Aliyu, M. A. (2023). Sports journalism reporting in the era of digital media in Nigeria. *Konfrontasi: Jurnal Kultural, Ekonomidan Perubahan Sosial*, 10(3), 124-134.