

“It’s basically everywhere”. Young Adults’ Perceptions of Gambling Advertising in the UK

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Introduction

- UK industry spending on gambling advertising grew over 17% per year since 2014 to £1.5 billion in 2018.¹
- Gambling advertising may operate as a facilitator of gambling-related harm (Figure.1).
- The effects of gambling advertising include increased gambling participation and riskier (more impulsive) gambling.²
- Recent studies show that young people are exposed to a high amount of gambling advertisements and may misinterpret promotional gambling messages.³
- Limited research however has focused upon the perceptions and experiences of young adults in relation to gambling advertising.
- Young adults have access to the unique gambling environment of the UK and are highlighted as a target-demographic for specific gambling advertisements.⁴

Research questions

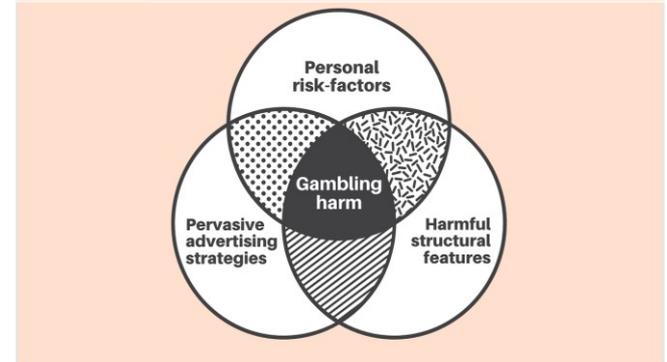
The current study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the attitudes and opinions of young adults towards gambling advertising in the UK?
2. What are their perceptions about the influence of gambling advertising upon gambling behaviors?
3. What are young adults’ perceptions about current measures in the UK to minimize the potential risks and harms associated with gambling advertising?

Methods

- An online qualitative survey was conducted with 62 young adult gamblers (18-29 years-old) in the UK.
- The survey investigated the place, meaning, and influence of gambling advertising within the lives of the participants. Gambling frequency was also recorded.
- Demographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with qualitative data interpreted using inductive thematic analysis techniques.⁵

Figure 1. The bespoke-risk environment of gambling

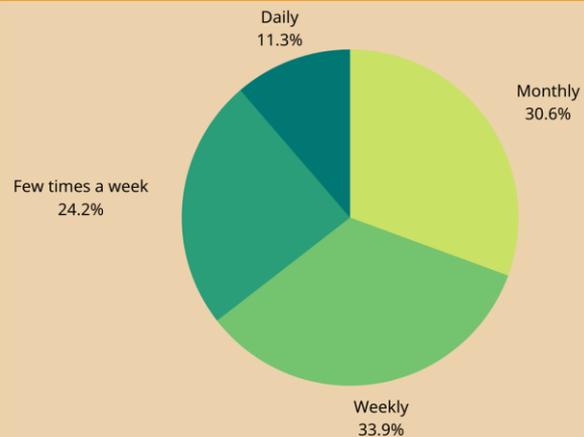


Results

Participant characteristics

- A total of 62 young adults participated in the study. The sample was aged 18-29, had a mean age of 23.69 (SD = 3.46), and most (n = 49, 79%) were male.
- The self-reported gambling frequency of the sample is displayed in Figure 2.
- The majority of male participants (n=49) reported participation in online sports betting with the highest frequency (n = 45, 91.8%) compared to other gambling types. Amongst female participants (n=13), the National Lottery draw was the most frequently reported gambling behavior (n = 8, 65%).

Figure 2. The self-reported gambling frequency of the sample



Theme 1. Awareness and perceptions of gambling advertising strategies

Advertising saturation: Participants felt that their day-to-day experiences were '*saturated*' with gambling advertisements in which '*every other ad is gambling-related*'.

Exposure amongst the vulnerable: Many young adults provided moral judgements indicating that it was not only unethical, but also '*manipulative*' to expose gambling-related advertising to those considered particularly susceptible to advertising influence.

Amalgamating gambling and the young-male identity: Gambling (especially sports betting) advertisements were perceived to intentionally exploit the relationship between gambling and the young masculine identity.

Misleading and disingenuous content: Incentive marketing techniques (i.e free £10 bet) were deemed to '*abuse the loopholes of language*' and deliver '*false promises*' in order to deceptively persuade customers to engage with specific gambling products .

Theme 2. The perceived influence and impact of gambling advertising

Increased participation or gambling intentions: It was reported by participants that gambling advertising can be attributed to an increased intent or induced gambling participation amongst audiences.

Normalization: Celebrity endorsement, social media marketing and glamorous depictions of gambling via adverts were considered instrumental in the general normalisation of gambling in the UK.

Misinterpretation: Advertisements were also deemed responsible for audiences (mis)perceiving the levels of risk and control associated with gambling by depicting the behavior as '*an way of making easy money*'.

Third-person effect: For many participants, the effects of gambling advertising were deemed powerful and effective; but only in reference to others rather than themselves

Theme 3. The need for improved public health measures

Tokenistic 'responsible gambling' messages: These messages were considered contrived, superficial and ineffective by several participants.

Tighter regulation or advertising prohibition: Many participants stated a need to regulate gambling advertising in the same way as tobacco and alcohol advertisements.

Discussion

- The recent increase and expansion of UK gambling advertising corresponds with participants reporting their lived experiences to be saturated with such content ¹.
- Complications are therefore highlighted surrounding the realistic utility and efficacy of self-regulation within the UK gambling sphere.
- Studies of Australian gambling adverts also highlight industry attempts to amalgamate the young masculine identity with participation in gambling. This is particularly noticeable in UK sports betting ⁶.
- The findings also supplement the international literature base in which consumers appear to provide relatively negative perceptions towards the overall normalization of gambling behavior via advertising ³.
- The perceptions of the current sample suggest a structural and regulatory overhaul is warranted in an attempt to minimize consumer deception and advertising bombardment amongst vulnerable audiences within the UK

Conclusions / Recommendations

- The accounts provided by the young adults of the current study indicate that they perceive numerous negative effects of gambling advertising at both the individual and societal level.
- Gambling advertising was described as pervasive, misleading and demographically targeted.
- Numerous impacts were attributed to gambling advertising such as increased gambling intentions/participation alongside the normalisation of gambling in a broader social context.
- Participants expressed a need for more effective public health measures such as tighter regulations placed on gambling advertising. The current 'responsible' gambling measures were described as 'tokenistic' and unsuccessful.
- Such narratives offer experiential evidence in contribution to the international debate surrounding the recognition of gambling as an issue of public health.
- Future research is needed to ensure support for measures to promote ethical industry marketing in accordance with those implemented or proposed for tobacco and alcohol.

Conflict of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interests with respect to this study nor the contents of this presentation / poster.

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