

Research reveals powerful lure of gambling adverts on social media to children

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

A new report has exposed how children and young people are vulnerable to the growing popularity of gambling adverts on social media, prompting calls from leading experts for much tighter regulations.

The research, published today as part of a policy briefing led by the University of Bristol, found gambling [advertising](#) is vastly more appealing to children than adults.

Most notably, the study findings showed disguised gambling marketing and ads for betting on esports—professional online competing in computer games—were nearly four times more appealing to children than adults. It also revealed nearly half of children are exposed to such advertising weekly and around a quarter encounter it daily.

Whereas results showed the vast majority of adults were wary or annoyed when faced with gambling ads, children mainly reacted positively.

Co-lead investigator Dr. Raffaello Rossi, who is conducting first-of-its-kind research into the use and impact of gambling advertising on [social media](#), said: "The overwhelming strong appeal of gambling advertising on social media to children is of huge concern, as it is known the earlier people start gambling the more likely it will become habitual and problematic.

"That's why there needs to be much stricter and clearer rules in place to clamp down on the issue, which could easily spiral out of control given how long children and young people spend on social media these days. Many of the adverts may look entirely innocent and harmless, but they in fact pose a serious risk of getting a whole new generation of gamblers hooked on a serious addiction which has devastating consequences."

The report, in light of its findings and previous studies, is calling for:

- Esports gambling advertising, which automatically appeals to children and young people, to be banned.
- Gambling content marketing, which masquerades as something

appealing, to be rigorously regulated and informed by what is proven to attract young people.

- Regulators to broaden the age range of a 'young person' from 16–17 to 16- to 24-year-olds.
- Social media platforms to only allow gambling ads on social media when users actively opt-in to receive them.

The report comes as the Gambling Act is currently being reviewed by the government, and the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) has launched a consultation to better protect children from gambling advertising which appeals to them.

Although Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) codes currently forbid gambling advertising from being of 'particular appeal to children and young persons,' there are no previous investigations into what exactly appeals to them. While adverts using cartoons may be banned on such grounds, the research findings showed posts featuring cartoons were least appealing to children and the most appealing ads, which were more subtle, would not breach regulations.

This study surveyed online 210 children aged 11 to 17 years, 222 young people aged 18 to 24, and 221 adults aged 25 to 78 years in the UK from May to July last year.

It showed nearly half (45.2 percent) of children and almost three-quarters of young people (72.4 percent) saw gambling advertising on Twitter at least once a week. A quarter of children (25.2 percent) and more than a third (37.3 percent) of young people reported seeing it daily.

Findings also revealed the vast majority of gambling ads on Twitter (19 out of 24) were twice as likely to appeal to children and young people than older adults, with young people reacting most favorably. While nearly two-thirds (15 out of 24) gambling adverts prompted [positive](#)

[emotions](#) for young people, such as excited, happy, or delighted, less than a third (seven out of 24) resulted in a positive emotional response among adults. By contrast, adults were found to be four-times more likely to react negatively, feeling distress, anger, or tension when exposed to gambling ads.

These trends were most pronounced with gambling content marketing, which was found to be nearly four-times more appealing to children and young people than adults with almost all the ads (11 out of 12) triggering positive emotions in children and young people, compared to less than half of them (seven out of 12) doing so for adults.

Esports gambling adverts were also found to be much more appealing to children and young people than adults, who were shown to be four-times more likely to feel extremely negative emotions about the ads than children.

Co-lead investigator Agnes Nairn, Professor of Marketing at the University of Bristol's School of Management, said: "We know from previous research that children are actively following and engaging with gambling content on social media and regulators are struggling to keep up with this trend. This new research shines a spotlight on two specific types of gambling adverts: content marketing and esports that are strongly and significantly more appealing to children and young people than to older adults.

"Importantly, the current regulations do not address these types of advertising at all. The esports market is forecast to exceed a billion dollars this year. It has an audience of 500 million people, most of them children and [young people](#). The regulations need to be reformed as a matter of urgency."

The Young Gamers and Gamblers Education Trust (YGAM), a leading

UK gambling-harm prevention charity, provides a range of education programs, working with thousands of schools and youth practitioners to help engage with and safeguard future generations against gambling harms.

Kevin Clelland, Strategic Alliance Director at YGAM, said: "A key part of our programs focus on gambling advertising, as well as the growth of esports, and this latest research will further inform our evidence-led resources. The findings support the evidence we submitted to the Gambling Act Review where we called for more to be done to minimize the exposure that children have to gambling advertising. All [gambling](#) advertising should be designed and displayed in a way that is appropriate for adults and avoids marketing techniques that appeal to [children](#). There is opportunity to strengthen advertising protections and both the advertisers and the platforms which host adverts should use technology and data to do more."

More information: What are the odds? The appeal of gambling adverts to children and young persons on Twitter.

www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristols/what-are-the-odds/

Provided by University of Bristol

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