

New evidence exposes huge scale of gambling marketing at start of Premier League football season

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NEW SEASON, MORE SELF-REGULATION, MORE MARKETING.

The Prevalence of Gambling Adverts during the Opening Weekend of the English Premier League 2023/2024.

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Credit: University of Bristol and Channel 5

Research has revealed for the first time the extent gambling messages saturate UK media coverage and social media during the opening weekend of the English Premier League football season.

The [rapid assessment](#), carried out by the University of Bristol in collaboration with Channel 5 last month, monitored live televised coverage, sports news programming, sports news radio, and [social media](#) over the weekend of 11–14 August.

Key headline findings were:

- A total of 10,999 gambling messages were identified during the weekend across various media channels.
- 6,966 gambling messages were recorded during the six live match broadcasts.
- 92% out of 391 content marketing ads sent by major gambling brands, were not clearly identifiable as advertising—and therefore breaching a key advertising regulation.
- Less than a quarter (20.6%) included gambling harm reduction messages and only 18.7% featured age warnings—leaving the majority without any warnings.
- There was at least one gambling ad during any commercial break on TalkSport Radio and 600 gambling messages during two hours of Sky Sports News.
- 1,902 gambling ads on social media, generating a total of 34 million impressions (the number of times an advert was seen).

Gambling messages refers to the number of identical messages or references (such as logos) which were exposed to the audience during the weekend and content marketing aims to engage current and potential consumer bases through content that may not be directly related to the

promoted product or brand.

Co-lead researcher Dr. Raffaello Rossi, lecturer in marketing at the University of Bristol Business School, said, "Our research shows gambling marketing during Premier League weekends is inescapable. Football fans are bombarded with gambling marketing through various channels, making it a normal part of football consumption.

"Our study highlights a serious issue with social media gambling marketing—especially content marketing. A staggering 92% of content marketing ads are not clearly identifiable as advertising, breaching key advertising regulations. We urgently need to strengthen those regulations to protect consumers—in particular children, who are especially vulnerable to sneaky advertising."

Using validated codebooks from prior research, the scope of the study comprised over 24 hours of match broadcasts, 15 hours of Sky Sports News coverage, 14 hours of TalkSport Radio broadcasts, and the scrutiny of gambling ads posted on [social media platforms](#) during the specified period.

Across all media channels examined, the study identified a total of 10,999 gambling messages. This high figure illustrates the persistence of gambling marketing during this period, which translates to an average of 2,750 messages per day or 115 messages every hour.

Match broadcasts accounted for the majority of the gambling messaging totaling 6,966 messages (63%), followed by Sky Sports News with 2,014 messages (18%), social media with 1,902 messages (17%), and TalkSport Radio with 117 messages (2%). Social media gambling ads during the weekend amounted over 30m impressions—highlighting its reach and importance in amplifying gambling advertisement.

The analysis of six Premier League matches showcased the dominance of gambling messaging. Within this limited time frame, a total of 6,966 gambling messages were recorded during live match broadcasts.

The study also revealed the extent gambling advertising in football is in breach of basic advertising regulation. Of the 391 content marketing ads sent by major gambling brands, 92% were in breach as they were not clearly identifiable as advertising.

In addition, out of the 10,999 gambling messages, less than a quarter (20.6%) included gambling harm reduction messages (e.g., BeGambleAware), and only 18.7% featured age warnings, leaving the majority of the gambling messages without any warnings.

There was at least one gambling advert during any commercial break on TalkSport Radio. Analysis of TalkSport Radio programming found that at least one gambling advertisement was present during any commercial break, demonstrating the continuous promotion of gambling on this platform.

There were 600 gambling messages during two hours of Sky Sports News. During a single two-hour segment of Sky Sports News, 600 gambling messages were shown. This accentuates the prevalence of gambling marketing beyond live sports broadcast, further contributing to the saturation of gambling marketing in the general media landscape.

The study identified 1,902 gambling ads on social media over the Premier League weekend, which generated 34 million impressions (the number of times an ad has been seen). This data highlights the substantial influence and effectiveness of social media as a platform for gambling advertising—with social media emerging as a key channel for gambling marketing, amplifying its reach and impact.

Dr. Raffaello Rossi said, "Self-regulation of the gambling industry is completely failing. The gambling industry's primary goal is profit, not public welfare. So, of course they will not implement measures that actually reduce gambling and their profits. This is why the UK Government has to fulfill its duty and start protecting people from predatory and excessive gambling marketing.

"Other countries such as Italy, Spain, Poland, Netherlands and Belgium have all started to introduce harsh restrictions and even bans on gambling marketing. It is unbelievable that the White Paper has completely ignored this, and the government is very little to protect people from excessive gambling marketing."

In 2022 the University of Bristol launched the Bristol Hub for Gambling Harms Research to lead pioneering multidisciplinary research into the wide-reaching effects of gambling harms.

The independent hub facilitates world-leading research to improve understanding of gambling harm as a growing public health issue which needs greater scrutiny and regulation.

Co-lead researcher Dr. Jamie Wheaton, Research Associate at the Bristol Hub for Gambling Harms Research, added, "While policies like the whistle-to-whistle and front-of-shirt sponsorship bans are steps in the right direction, they've been repeatedly shown to be ineffective. We urgently need comprehensive legislation to regulate gambling messages during matches and beyond, including hoardings, shirts, radio, and social [media](#).

"We believe the whistle-to-whistle ban needs to include all forms of marketing: on hoardings, shirts, and ad breaks, including TV, radio and online. Other countries have already started to ban gambling marketing from sports—we need to follow their lead."

Alexia Clifford, GambleAware chief communications officer, said, "Gambling content marketing is almost four times more appealing to children and young people than adults. We also know that young people's exposure to gambling advertising is associated with a greater risk of gambling harms. The Premier League's decision to ban gambling companies from front of shirts from 2026 is welcome, but it does not go far enough.

"The government's recently published Gambling White Paper is a missed opportunity to strengthen regulation around gambling advertising, marketing and sponsorship in sport, and to protect children.

"If you're worried about how [gambling](#) makes you feel, GambleAware can help. For free and confidential advice, tools and support, search GambleAware or contact the National Gambling Helpline, available 24/7, on 0808 8020 133."

Provided by University of Bristol

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