

# Research reveals huge volume of sports gambling advertising on social media in the US

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Sports fans are being bombarded daily with gambling advertising via social media in the United States—and the majority of ads could be in breach of regulations, according to a new study.

The findings, exposing non-compliance with the industry's codes, have prompted calls for strict legislation to better curb and police online gambling advertising, which has surged in recent years.

The [rapid review](#), led by marketing experts at the University of Bristol in the U.K., found nearly 1,700 gambling ads were posted on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook by four leading sports gambling brands during a single week, equating to more than 230 ads each day.

More than 4 in 5 (81%) were organic ads, as opposed to paid-for, and the majority of this type of ad (58%) were not clearly identifiable as advertising.

Three-quarters of the studied organic ads contained no responsible gaming messages or help hotlines and a significant proportion of them (8%) were also judged to be especially appealing to children, potentially flouting American Gaming Association (AGA) regulations.

Lead author Dr. Raffaello Rossi, Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Bristol Business School, said, "What we have seen in several countries, including the U.S., is that self-regulation of advertising in the gambling industry often falls short of protecting young and vulnerable audiences; instead it tends to prioritize the industry's interests.

"The fact that over 1,000 ads appear to breach regulations, with many having strong appeal to minors is deeply concerning.

"The sheer volume of gambling ads, paired with a lack of warnings and

responsible gaming messaging, reflects an aggressive marketing strategy that aims to normalize gambling as a harmless and fun activity."

The techniques used by sports betting companies appear to be attracting attention. The 1,353 organic ads studied generated more than 29 million views, 1.1million likes, and were shared with other users nearly 60,500 times.

Whereas a large percentage of the organic ads studied were non-compliant, all 310 paid-for ads stuck to the regulations.

Dr. Rossi explained, "Many of the gambling ads we encountered blur the line between entertainment and advertising, making it challenging for users—especially younger ones—to recognize that they are being marketed a highly addictive product.

"In fact, almost half of the all the ads in our study are hard to spot as advertisements, which highlights some real concerns about these techniques."

The report recommends the introduction of federal legislation to ensure consistent regulation, including clear protocols for responsible gambling messages, age verification, and ad content.

It also calls for clear enforcement mechanisms, including audits and penalties, especially for organic content marketing which is currently slipping under the radar and being used to target children. Banning celebrities from featuring in such ads is also among the proposals—another popular tool used to entice children.

Report co-author Dr. Jamie Wheaton, Senior Research Associate at the University of Bristol, added, "The social media marketing strategies being deployed by gambling operators are maximizing their reach to a

wider audience.

"Our findings stress the urgent need for federal legislation to enforce consistent regulation of gambling-related marketing on social media to ensure audiences, especially children and those more vulnerable, are protected."

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

The independent hub, based at the University of Bristol, funds and facilitates world-leading research to improve understanding of [gambling](#) harm as a growing public health issue which needs greater scrutiny and regulation.

**More information:** Betting on Social Media: [bristol.ac.uk/media-library/si ... Research Report.pdf](https://bristol.ac.uk/media-library/si..._Research_Report.pdf)

Provided by University of Bristol

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