



Perceptions of gambling marketing among young adult gamblers in Ireland

Institute for Social Marketing and Health
University of Stirling

Report for the Institute of Public Health
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1 Summary



1. Summary

Background

While gambling marketing in Ireland has recently captured greater public and policy attention, no research has explored how it is viewed by gamblers, or their perceptions of messaging on gambling marketing and marketing-related controls.

Methods

One-to-one interviews were conducted in February-March 2022 with 16 young adults (18-34 years) in Ireland, with 8 low-risk and 8 high-risk gamblers. Participants were asked about exposure to and perceptions of gambling marketing, response to voluntary restrictions on gambling marketing and possible regulations, and views on industry messaging that is or has been shown on gambling marketing ('When the fun stops stop' and 'Take time to think') and novel messaging. The novel messages were intended to be humorous (e.g. 'The best way to double your money is to fold it and put it back in your pocket'), explain the range of harms that may be associated with gambling ('Gambling can result in serious personal, social, emotional and financial problems'), or were related to family (e.g. 'Gambling can be a family disease. If one person is addicted the whole family suffers') or mental health (e.g. 'Gambling is linked to poorer mental health, depression and even suicide').

Results

Marketing: Participants indicated that they were exposed to gambling marketing frequently and through various channels, most commonly television and online. For some it was viewed as pervasive. Participants were familiar with multiple gambling-related offers and promotions, including new customer or sign-up offers, free or matched bets or spins, price offers and bonuses, time-limited bets and offers, risk minimising offers, jackpots, and loyalty/rewards schemes. Several were sceptical of the conditions attached to offers and promotions. Gambling marketing was something that many participants discussed with others. Different views of gambling marketing strategies were expressed, with adverts using humour, for instance, thought to give the impression that gambling was easy, fun and entertaining. Winning in adverts was seen as the norm, and thought to present an outcome that they could identify with and aspire to. Gambling marketing was thought to influence behaviour by prompting participants to place a bet or take advantage of offers and promotions, and participants indicated that they had or would bet or deposit more than intended to benefit from an offer or promotion.

Regulations: The industry's whistle-to-whistle ban on gambling advertising in sports (where advertising is not shown from 5 minutes before to 5 minutes after a live sporting event before 9pm) was considered a measure that could help reduce exposure and temptation. However, several participants were critical that it was voluntary and does not cover all sports (horse or greyhound racing), viewed the timeframe as insufficient (as many people start watching more than 5 minutes before a sporting event), and explained that there are sporting events post-9pm and their exposure to gambling marketing remains high. The consensus was that a proposed requirement to have to opt-in to receive gambling advertising by text, phone, email, social media or any other remote means would be

beneficial for them and for children. The proposal to prevent gambling companies sending marketing materials to those who have self-excluded was considered appropriate and helpful. There was a mixed response to a complete ban on gambling advertising.

Messaging: There were mixed views of industry ‘responsible gambling’ messages on gambling adverts. Many participants were sceptical of these as they were viewed as small, fleeting (on broadcast media), vague, promotional, and forced rather than a meaningful attempt to help consumers. In terms of alternative messaging, messages intended to be humorous were considered memorable but seen to downplay the seriousness of gambling. The response to a message outlining the multiple harms that can be related to gambling was vague and generic for some, but straightforward and realistic for others. Messages related to the family, and mental health, were typically viewed as hard-hitting and thought-provoking, particularly for high-risk gamblers. For the two messages that included a link to advice or help (specifically a helpline and website), the shared view was that a signal to available help was important and necessary. Options for strengthening the impact of messages were proposed, such as showing a message throughout the duration of an advert, having adverts focused solely on the potential harms associated with gambling, and including testimonials or relevant statistics within adverts. It was also felt that such messaging should be designed and mandated by government.

Conclusions

The study provides an insight into how gambling marketing in Ireland is viewed by young adult gamblers. Exposure was high and for several participants unwelcome. Possible measures aimed at addressing the high volume of gambling marketing, and protecting young people, were generally viewed favourably. The voluntary messaging currently displayed in gambling marketing received criticism. Where gambling marketing is permitted the inclusion of messaging that is designed independently of the gambling industry, and clear regulations specifying the acceptable presentation of such messaging, would help ensure that consumers are better informed about the potential risks associated with gambling.



2 Introduction



2. Introduction

Gambling is a popular and for many people benign activity. However, for some it can lead to problems. Those who have issues with gambling can experience a range of negative impacts, including with their mental and physical health, finances, relationships and employment (Murphy, 2019; Allami et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2023). As a result, the deleterious consequences of gambling affect significant others as well as institutions in the health, welfare and justice systems (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019). There are a wide range of factors that may contribute to the development of gambling-related harms. One may be gambling marketing, which has attracted growing academic, public and policy interest (Newall et al., 2019).

Gambling marketing

Thomas et al (2023) define gambling marketing as 'direct and indirect advertising, promotion, sponsorship, incentives, public relations, lobbying, and donations that are strategically used by the gambling industry to promote its products, gain publicity, attract new customers, shape social and cultural attitudes, and build corporate and product image and support'. There has been a greater focus on attempting to understand gambling marketing and its potential impact on consumers in recent years, particularly on children and young people, who may be more susceptible to marketing (Monaghan et al., 2008), and those experiencing harm, who account for a significant proportion of overall gambling spend (Fiedler et al., 2019; Murphy, 2019).

A number of reviews have explored the evidence on gambling marketing and its effects on consumer perceptions and behaviours (e.g. Binde 2014; Parke et al., 2015; Newall et al., 2019; Bouguettaya et al., 2020; Guillou-Landreat et al., 2021). Newall et al (2019), for instance, reviewed research published between 2014 and 2018 that explored the content and frequency of gambling marketing, how it was perceived, and any behavioural impact. Gambling marketing was found to be highly targeted, and particularly common around sport, with perceptions of such marketing generally negative, particularly among gamblers. There was some evidence suggesting that awareness of gambling marketing may be associated with more frequent and riskier gambling behaviour (Newall et al., 2019).

Systematic reviews typically include a higher number of quantitative than qualitative studies (Guillou-Landreat et al., 2021; Killick & Griffiths, 2021). While quantitative research has been critical in driving knowledge on the impact of gambling advertising (Wardle, 2019), qualitative research is important as it allows in-depth insight into the attitudes and opinions of individuals. Qualitative studies, such as interviews, can provide knowledge about how people experience gambling advertising and mechanisms of impact (Binde, 2007; Hing et al., 2014). There are, however, fewer qualitative studies on gambling advertising, particularly in Europe. A critical and meta-analytic review of 28 studies on the relationship between exposure to gambling advertising and gambling attitudes, intentions and behaviour, for instance, included only a single qualitative study from Europe (Bouguettaya et al., 2020).

We identified one study in Ireland on gambling marketing. Between December 2018 and July 2019, gambling adverts shown during 65 live televised sporting events (football, rugby, gaelic football, hurling) were analysed (Columb et al., 2020). The study included adverts shown up to 30 minutes before kick-off, half-time, and up to 30 minutes after matches ended. Gambling adverts were shown in 75% of matches, most commonly for football.

Gambling adverts were observed in 72% of half-time advert breaks, 66% of pre-game advert breaks, and 45% of post-game advert breaks (Columb et al., 2020).

Messaging accompanying gambling marketing

Gambling operators often voluntarily include messaging in gambling marketing to promote 'responsible' or 'safer' gambling behaviours (Newall et al., 2021). Within the British Isles, the voluntary messages most commonly used have been 'When the fun stops stop' and 'Take time to think'. Most (89%) adverts in Ireland have been found to contain responsible gambling messaging (Columb et al., 2020), but this type of messaging has been criticised (van Schalkwyk et al., 2021; Rintoul, 2022) and independent research has found that exposure to both of these messages has no beneficial effect on gambling behaviour (Newall et al., 2021; Newall et al., in press).

Gambling in Ireland

There is no regular national survey in Ireland regarding the prevalence of problem gambling (Kerr et al., 2021), but approximately two-thirds of those aged 15 and older reported past-year gambling and two-fifths past-month gambling (Department of Health, 2019). The value of the Irish gambling market annually is estimated to be between €8-10 billion (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019; O'Halloran, 2021), with the amount spent on gambling per capita higher than in all but one EU country (Wilcox, 2019). While most gamble recreationally, 0.3% of those aged 15 years and older are estimated to have a gambling problem, which is most common among males (Mongan et al., 2022). Young adults (18-34 year-olds) are less likely to gamble than those in older age groups but have the highest rates of problem gambling (Department of Health, 2019). It is not clear what impact, if any, Covid had on gambling behaviour, but a 180% increase in visits to the [GamblingCare.ie](https://www.gamblingcare.ie) website was reported at the start of 2021 (McGarry, 2021).

Responsibility for licensing and regulating gambling in Ireland has been shared between multiple departments and agencies, thus hindering a coherent approach to licensing, compliance, enforcement and consumer protection (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019). Most gambling regulation is outdated. Plans for new gambling laws, including related to marketing, were announced in 2011, but progress has been slow. In 2019, the Government's Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling reported that: 'Currently there is no legislation dealing specifically with matters of sponsorship, advertising, and promotion by the gambling industry outside of the standard such requirements of the Codes of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI)' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019).

In 2021 the Department of Justice's Action Plan set out plans for establishing a Gambling Regulator, a body with public safety and wellbeing within their remit, and legislation to license and regulate the industry (Department of Justice, 2021). At the end of 2022, the Gambling Regulation Bill allowed for the establishment of a Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland (GRAI), a new statutory body responsible for the licensing and regulation of gambling services in Ireland, including the power to impose obligations relating to advertising, promotion and sponsorship for the purposes of safeguarding persons participating in gambling (Department of Justice, 2022). In 2023, James Browne, Ireland's Minister of State for Law Reform, stated that moving the Gambling Regulation Bill through the Oireachtas was a key priority (O'Hagan, 2023).

In recent years a range of gambling marketing controls have been proposed in Ireland. Section 110(6) of the General Scheme of the Gambling Regulation Bill in 2021 proposed that any promotion or information concerning promotions offered by a license holder must not be issued or given to a person participating in any form of exclusionary measure. Section 5(1b) of the General Scheme of the Gambling Regulation Bill mentioned a ban on the advertising of any licensed game, service, activity or product authorised under this Act, on social media websites and apps, and by telephony, text message, email or any other remote means, except where a person has signed up to a license holder's service on that social media platform or consented to receiving such advertising (Department of Justice, 2021). The Irish Labour Party, in 2021, suggested a complete ban on gambling advertising (Orme-Claye, 2021). Within the vacuum that existed, the Irish Bookmakers Association introduced a Safer Gambling Code, which has been adopted by most betting companies in the country. The code, which took effect from September 2021, included a pre-watershed (9pm) whistle-to-whistle advertising ban in live sport, with exclusions for horse and greyhound racing (Irish Bookmakers Association, 2021).

Objectives

The literature on gambling marketing is growing, although it is nascent compared with the tobacco and alcohol fields (Bouguettaya et al., 2020; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2020). Given the dearth of research on gambling marketing in Ireland (Columb et al., 2020), we conducted in-depth interviews with young adult gamblers to explore their awareness of, and attitudes to, gambling marketing, and the self-reported impact, if any, on their behaviour. As the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling in Ireland recommended consideration be given to the types of 'health messaging' displayed on gambling marketing communications (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019), response to messaging commonly used, and alternative messaging, was also explored.

Finally, given recent or proposed controls on gambling marketing in Ireland we explored how these were viewed.



3 Methods



3. Methods

Design and sample

One-to-one interviews were conducted between February and March 2022 with 16 young adults (aged 18-34 years) in Ireland. The sample included eight gamblers considered to be low-risk, who scored less than three on the nine-item Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), and eight considered to be high-risk, who scored eight or more on the PGSI (range 8-25). We focused on low-risk gamblers as they account for most gamblers (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2020), and those experiencing problems related to gambling as it is important to understand the impacts of gambling marketing on this population (Binde, 2009). The target sample was young adults as they are considered more susceptible to gambling marketing (Pechmann et al., 2005; Ipsos MORI, 2020; Guillou-Landreat et al., 2021) and have the highest rates of problem gambling in Ireland (Department of Health, 2019), consistent with a recent meta-analysis which found that gamblers aged under 35 are at a higher risk of problem gambling than older gamblers (Allami et al., 2021). The low-risk group was split by gender, with three-quarters (6 of 8) of the high-risk group males. Within the high-risk group, the disproportionate number of males was because males are more likely to experience problems with gambling and seek help for gambling in Ireland (Mongan et al., 2022). Indeed, Condrón et al (in press) analysed treatment episodes for problem gambling in Ireland between 2008 and 2019, finding that almost 95% of problem gamblers were male.

The sample was recruited by a market research agency in Dublin (GroFieldwork) using active solicitation outside gambling venues, an approach commonly used in gambling research (Williams et al., 2010), and existing panels. Potential participants completed a recruitment questionnaire, with screening questions (including age, gender, questions about gambling behaviour, and the PGSI) to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria. The PGSI was used given the sample was sought from the general public, with some support for the PGSI in non-clinical contexts (Holtgraves, 2009).

Procedure

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, given that the moderator (CM) was based in Scotland and the participants in Ireland. Zoom had the advantage of allowing interviews to be rescheduled at short notice, where this was required. Interviews were audio recorded with participant's consent. A semi-structured topic guide, about exposure to and perceptions of gambling marketing, marketing-related controls, and messaging, was used to facilitate discussion. Participants were asked where they saw or heard gambling marketing, then about marketing during sports events and on several channels (social media, post, newspapers, radio, and then email, text and phone), free bets, their thoughts about gambling marketing and potential gambling-marketing controls. To aid discussion, all participants were shown four examples of gambling marketing during the interview; 1) a TV advert for slots featuring Jose Mourinho, 2) an online advert for slots, 3) a leaflet for a postcode lottery, and 4) a poster offering free bets on a horse race (see Figure 1 for example of stimuli shown). Each was related to the topic being discussed, and shown after participants had been asked about exposure to gambling marketing in certain channels (TV, online, or post) or to specific types of gambling marketing (free bets).

Participants were subsequently shown nine images displaying messages related to gambling, which were presented one at a time, and asked what they thought about each. The first two were voluntary industry messages often included in gambling adverts, 'When the fun stops stop' and 'Take time to think'. The former has been used since 2015 prior to being replaced by the latter in 2021. Seven novel messages, proposed by the team, were then presented to participants, shown on the same gambling advert each time to better reflect how this would appear, at least on static gambling adverts, and allow participants to focus on the message (see Table 2 for messages and Figure 2 for example). Each message was presented in bold capitalised text against a yellow background, which covered approximately 25% of the available space. The size of the text was designed to occupy the available space. The seven messages were intended to be either humorous, consistent with the type of messaging often used in gambling adverts, or to explain possible harms associated with gambling, as is standard for other potentially addictive and harmful products such as tobacco. These messages covered harms that may be associated with gambling or were related to potential impacts on family or mental health. Two of the messages (one on family, one on mental health) included information about available help.

Interviews lasted, on average, 65 minutes (range 54-76 minutes), and were audio recorded with participant's consent. The study received approval from the General University Ethics Panel at the University of Stirling (GUEP3609).

Figure 1: Example of stimuli shown (branding removed) during interviews

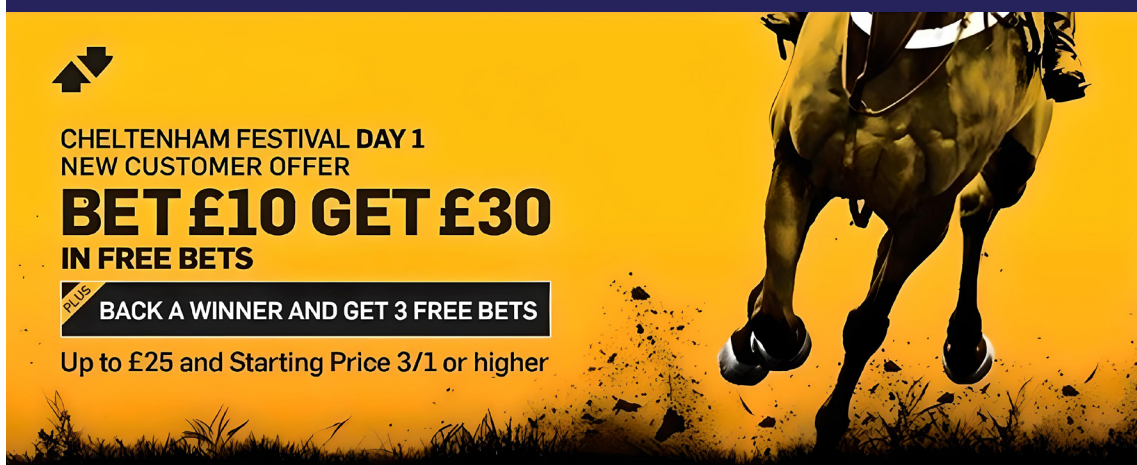


Table 1: Gambling-related messaging presented

Theme	Message number	Message
Industry	1	When the fun stops stop.
	2	Take time to think.
Humour	3	The best way to double your money is to fold it and put it back in your pocket.
	4	There is a reason that gambling companies make billions of Euros each year in Ireland. The best strategy is not to gamble.
Harms	5	Gambling can result in serious personal, social, emotional and financial problems.
Family	6	Gambling can be a family disease. If one person is addicted the whole family suffers.
	7	Gambling can have negative and long-lasting consequences for you and your family. Want more information about gambling? 089 241 5401 www.problemgambling.ie
Mental health	8	Gambling is linked to poorer mental health, depression and even suicide. Want advice or help? Call 089 241 5401 or visit www.problemgambling.ie
	9	Here are some facts: A) Young men are most likely to experience harms due to their gambling B) Experiencing harms due to gambling is linked to suicide C) Suicide is the leading cause of death among young men Talk to the young men in your life.

Figure 2: Example of advert (branding removed) with message



The image shows a blue and red van with various gambling-related advertisements. The van features the hashtag #SUPERSUNDAE on its roof and side. A large sign on the side of the van displays "£/€10 NO-LOSS BET" with two soccer jerseys (one blue, one red) below it. Other text on the van includes "WIN HUNDREDS & THOUSANDS", "LOLLI-KLOPPS", "WIN A BIG SCOOP!", "HOME OF THE 99/1", and "POINT PÓDHA TÁB: ÉBROINT".

GAMBLING CAN HAVE NEGATIVE AND LONG-LASTING CONSEQUENCES FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GAMBLING?

089 241 5401  WWW.PROBLEMGAMBLING.IE

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed by a transcription agency, with CM checking the transcripts against the audio recording to ensure accuracy. Data were deidentified, and thematic analysis undertaken using an iterative approach. The analytic process followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. The steps involved were: (1) dataset familiarisation; (2) data coding; (3) generating initial themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing the report. CM and AM familiarised themselves with the transcripts and developed preliminary codes, which were refined through re-examination of the data and discussion. Where there are clear gender or gambling group differences these are drawn out in the findings. Quotes are used to provide examples of what participants discussed, using interview (Int) number, gender (M or F) and gambling group (HR or LR).

4 Results



4. Results

Exposure to gambling marketing

Participants typically reported high exposure to gambling marketing, often viewed as ubiquitous, e.g. *“Everywhere I can think of I think I’ve probably seen gambling adverts”* (Int 3, M, LR). Exposure tended to be lower for low-risk gamblers and high-risk gamblers that do not gamble online.

Everywhere! You see it on football jerseys, all over sports websites, when you’re watching football, when you’re watching horse racing, the first ad after it all is Skybet or Paddy Power, you, so social media as well (Int 16, M, HR).

There’s ads on the telly for the Lotto or, you know, you walk past a betting shop and the windows are just ads. And like the scratch cards up at the till are just on display. Also social media, like there’d be ads for stuff on that as well so it’s kind of everywhere you go really. There’s ads as well on like the side of buses and stuff like that, newspapers, everywhere (Int 2, F, LR).

Where do I not see it? Social media, all over the telly, especially the likes if you’re watching You Tube, every ad is nearly about a gambling company (Int 5, F, LR).

Several participants stated that they saw gambling marketing on a daily or near daily basis, e.g. *“I’d see ads coming up daily”* (Int 5, F, LR).

If you’re watching sports you, it’s impossible to miss it, it’s nearly a daily basis for myself (Int 16, M, HR).

They’re obviously posting stuff daily (on social media), you’d probably see something daily from, you know, Betfair or Paddy Power or one of those (Int 4, F, HR).

I mean social media, you can almost guarantee to see it daily, like just, even like reading the news, something will be like, ‘Ladbrokes, a lot better’ or whatever would come up (Int 11, F, LR).

Participants reported seeing or hearing gambling marketing on multiple channels. Mention of gambling marketing in sports was common, e.g. *“It’s definitely like saturated in sports”* (Int 3, M, LR), with most references about televised football broadcasts. Branded gambling adverts and logos were observed through shirt sponsorship, on electronic and static pitchside advertising, or shown during ad breaks. One participant pointed out that gambling advertising is also visible on pitchside hoardings when he is playing five-a-side football.

They seem to get the sponsorship in anywhere they can, so no matter whether you're looking at the pitch, the player, it's there, there's a logo there no matter where you look. Like if it's not in the ads it's on the pitch in front of you (Int 5, F, LR).

Almost every other like advertisement around the pitch is something to do with some sort of gambling company (Int 11, F, LR).

I was playing five-a-side just on Tuesday and all the billboards around the side were all covered in Ladbrokes (Int 7, M, HR).

Marketing was also prominent on social media. Those frequently using social media reported seeing gambling marketing across most platforms, with Facebook and Twitter mentioned most often, leading one high-risk gambler to say *"You can't escape it"* (Int 13, M, HR). Participants cited various ways in which gambling marketing was displayed through social media channels, ranging from following gambling brands, suggested posts based on the activity of those they follow (i.e., others who engage with gambling brands or posts), branded adverts between stories and within feeds, promoted adverts, and embedded website banners.

If someone you know follows these other pages they're more than likely to pop up on your page as well so you'd probably see something daily from, you know, Betfair or Paddy Power or one of those (Int 4, F, HR).

I would notice that there are a lot of ads if you're flicking through people's stories... it just always manages to pop up and even when you're scrolling through like the feed it would be in there somewhere (Int 5, F, LR).

Tik Tok, Snapchat, You Tube, Instagram, I think every single one I've seen at least one gambling ad (Int 6, M, LR).

Participants regularly received direct marketing about rewards, offers and event specific promotions, primarily through email but also by text, push notifications and sponsored advertising banners on tracked websites, e.g. *"Paddy Power would send you an email every week saying about like what rewards you got from last week"* (Int 16, M, HR). It was suggested that the frequency of emails vary by company, what someone gambles on, and whether there is a major sporting event, e.g. *"If it's a big event you'll get them every day"* (Int 15, F, HR).

I've gotten texts before, but that's generally once they get your number like you'll continually get their marketing (Int 11, F, LR).

Boylesports send you one every probably three weeks, Paddy Power, Paddy Power text you when you qualify for a free bet (Int 14, M, HR).

They are emailing you to give you the, you know, extra special offer specific to you. But it's probably gone out to thousands of people (Int 13, M, HR).

While less common, participants described seeing gambling marketing in newspapers, primarily within the sports section of British and Irish publications, and on radio, particularly among those who listened to the radio frequently, e.g. *“You hear the ads on the radio every day”* (Int 14, M, HR). Radio adverts recalled were about the Irish lottery or major sporting events, and were most commonly attributed to national brands such as Paddy Power. There were also some reports of receiving gambling marketing through the post, although such exposure was limited as most had ‘no junk mail’ signage on their door to prevent unsolicited materials being delivered. This did not always prevent gambling marketing materials from being delivered. For instance, one participant, who had ‘no junk mail’ signage on their door, recalled receiving gambling marketing within post sent by supermarket Tesco. As a result of being a Tesco clubcard member, the mail they received was addressed to them, and therefore not considered junk mail.

I think bet to, bet something, but they have like an insert in the Tesco Clubcard leaflet. So like that [gambling marketing] originally wouldn't come in through the junk mail... obviously that's [Tesco marketing] addressed to someone and it's like, has all their Clubcard like vouchers and stuff in it, but I've actually have recalled them, I have recalled them having a betting leaflet within that (Int 11, F, LR).

Discussions about gambling marketing

For most participants gambling marketing was, at least sometimes, a topic of discussion. Participants talked about specific gambling brands or adverts, often those seen as memorable, humorous or that involved celebrities.

I've mentioned this a few times to my partner, you know saying about you know Paddy Power is being, you know having these really standout ads that, that are very edgy (Int 10, M, LR).

It's something that you could bring up with your friends, the lads in the pub, oh did you see that ad with your man in it? Yes, yes, yes. And then that brings up that discussion and then people who aren't on it could possibly be like what are you talking about, I never saw that ad. And then it's taken out the phone and showing them and then they look into it (Int 5, F, LR).

I have probably mentioned that Mourinho ad to a friend because I thought it was funny and he enjoyed it (Int 13, M, HR).

Participants also mentioned discussing or sharing (via social media or messaging platforms) bets, odds, offers or promotions with family members, friends, partners and work colleagues, e.g. *“Some people in work would say about the offers, earlier on they were talking about last year's offer for Cheltenham”* (Int 16, M, HR).

Sometimes my friends will say like a bet they've put on or a bet they've won and stuff like that and posted it on social media or sent it to me (Int 6, M, LR).



We have a syndicate, myself and a few lads and you put a tenner a week and we look out for specials (Int 14, M, HR).

I'd maybe put it in the group chat if we're doing bets or we're talking about the horse racing or whatever like, I'd kind of say 'oh well if you, you know, bet £10 you'll get £30 in Betfair or whatever', and kind of just share the information (Int 2, F, LR).

Other topics of discussion were related to gambling adverts being annoying, or the volume of gambling marketing.

When I was playing five a side with my friend, we were just saying it's everywhere now, you can't really get away from it (Int 7, M, HR).



Offers and promotions

Almost all participants were able to recall offers and promotions presented in gambling marketing on television, print, radio, outdoor, online (including social media) or through direct marketing. These included new customer/sign-up offers, free or matched bets/spins, price offers and bonuses, time-limited bets and offers, specific bets or odds, risk minimising offers, jackpots, prizes, and loyalty/rewards schemes.

It always usually says new customers, so just sign up with this amount and get this amount free bets (Int 1, M, HR).



Most of the time it's offers yeah, free 20 Euro bet when you sign up, or give 5 Euro and receive 15 Euro on free bets or something along them lines. Most of the time it's for joining up (Int 14, M, HR).

It's like sign up now you get a tenner free credit (Int 5, F, LR).

There was high awareness of free bets or spins offered online, on apps, and in gambling venues, e.g. *"With the apps I'm already signed up to, you would get like place two bets and you get a third bet free" (Int 5, F, LR)*. These types of offers were considered, by some, to encourage people to sign up with multiple companies. Some high-risk gamblers talked about loyalty schemes where the amount of the free bet was influenced by the amount bet during the previous week.

Even just being in store, like you'd be on like one of the machines and someone would come up and give you a card, a member of staff would give you a card with a code on and you scan into the machine and it would give you like a free bet (Int 1, M, HR).



Mostly offers, especially the ones with Cheltenham you know, that would be front page stuff, you will have five Euro free bet on the Gold Cup, or five Euro every day free bet in the paper... you buy your paper and you cut out the little token and you go in and they scan the QR code on the back and then you get a five Euro free bet (Int 14, M, HR).

I know a lot of people do matched playing, I don't do that, you're signing up to every bookmaker and taking advantage of the free bets and stuff (Int 4, F, HR).

Like Paddy Power only give you, they have like a loyalty system kind of thing... if you bet a fiver over seven days of the week, you'd get a fiver free bet. If you bet a tenner everyday over the seven days, you'd get a tenner free bet (Int 15, F, HR).

Participants discussed time-limited offers and bonuses, for instance good or boosted odds or prices if a bet is placed immediately or on an upcoming event. These were viewed as an enticement to gamble.

If I'm following a UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) fighter and there's a fight coming up they'd be like, they'll give you their pitch and they'd be like put on your bets on mybookie.org and sign up now to get X, Y and Z. They'd just be the same like telling you like there's a bonus bet or something on the UFC right now if you bet with us (Int 8, M, LR).

Definitely at the football matches they do tend to promote the, you know, half-time now put on next goal scorer, you know, to tempt you to kind of log in then place something (Int 4, F, HR).

The biggest would be kind of giving you the extra odds for a particular game that you've been looking at, you know that would, that would jump out, you know saying the odds are say 2 to 1, they say 'well get 12 to 1 on this bet', you know, if you bet now (Int 10, M, HR).

Participants were familiar with specific odds and bets, and aware of how to get odds for specific events, e.g. *"You can actually go on to Twitter or whatever, Facebook or whatever you have, and you can say #whatstheoddsaddy and give them a bet you want to place and they will write back with the odds for that bet"* (Int 14, M, HR). High-risk gamblers, in particular, were also aware of different risk minimising offers, such as bet insurance or conditions that return the initial stake, e.g. *"Say like at Cheltenham it would be like, like you don't lose even if it, if a horse, comes second, you'll win your money back"* (Int 9, M, HR). There was also mention of loyalty or rewards schemes, which ranged from receiving clothing to special offers, and a small number of participants alluded to jackpots and prizes.

The ones you're already signed up to would just tell you the promotions coming up, like this weekend we have accumulator insurance, if one team out of six teams lose we'll still pay if your team is up 2-0 we'll still pay out for winning goal, that's a recent Paddy Power one (Int 4, F, HR).

I've gotten one from Paddy Power and it was a pair of like pants, Paddy Power pants, and it was like thank you for being a loyal customer, or something, 'Welcome to Paddy Rewards Club' (Int 16, M, HR).

They also have like a weekly or like bi-weekly draw, it's like a Sunday draw it's called, where like you buy a ticket and then each week or two weeks they pick a number and then someone wins up to like a grand or something (Int 8, M, LR).

Terms of offers and promotions

Several participants discussed the terms and conditions or requirements of different types of offers and promotions. While new customer offers such as free bets were often seen as appealing, some participants pointed to the conditions attached to these, such as the requirement of a minimum spend or deposit, and the need to gamble a certain amount of money or play a certain number of times to withdraw any winnings.

There'd be new customer offers so you'd have to, if you didn't have an account with Betfair you'd have to create an account... you probably would get a bet, like a similar bet but it wouldn't be as good, it would probably (be) bet ten get ten or bet ten get five (Int 7, M, HR).

I think you'd have to deposit like 10 euros or whatever and then you'd have, after you deposited that, then the free bet part would appear on your balance (Int 1, M, HR).

You might have to qualify, you might have to place 50 euros that month in bets and then you'll get a certain amount of free spins or free bets back (Int 4, F, HR).

If it's qualifying, you might have to play a further X amount of times before you can withdraw (Int 4, F, HR).

Some participants had reservations about the visibility of the terms and conditions associated with offers, often displayed in small faint text or missing entirely. Others were suspicious of offers and promotions they deemed too good to be true, claiming that there had to be a catch or that the outcome was pre-decided.

They're kind of like you think, 'Jeez, that looks good', but there's always a... kind of a snag (Int 9, M, HR).

There is always a catch, don't get me wrong I still look at them and if they are good and they are legit then you know I'm 90% sure I'm going to go for it... 99% of the time there is strings attached to it (Int 14, M, HR).

Perceptions of gambling marketing

Style

Generally, participants felt that the use of humour within gambling marketing directly impacted on how gambling was viewed. Adverts featuring comical skits or jokes were seen as giving the erroneous impression that gambling was easy, fun and entertaining.

Say if Harry Macguire or someone got booked they'd make a joke out of it and then they would kind of say Harry Macguire to get sent off 10/1. So then you'd be laughing at the joke and you'd be like oh that's easy money in my eyes (Int 7, M, HR).

I'd say it would kind of take away from the serious nature of gambling, like it adds a more light-hearted view on it. It makes it seem more like a game or more casual than it probably is (Int 3, M, LR).

It makes it very light-hearted and just like a bit of fun... some people with actual addictions could really get roped into this on the misconception (Int 11, F, LR).

Some participants felt that an advert for online slots they were shown made it look easy to play, harmless, and could be mistaken by younger audiences as just a game.

To a young child it looks like a game, it's really bright colours, a sort of Indiana Jones looking fella in the corner (Int 16, M, HR).

I think they are absolutely lethal because they give the impression it's literally just a game, like a child could play it (Int 5, F, LR).

That doesn't look like gambling, that doesn't give me any sort of incline as to 'I'll be gambling if I do this', it looks just more like I'm having fun here, you know there's a game... it takes like the, the like the dangerous aspect out of it and puts just the fun... it just puts the fun aspect in the forefront of your mind (Int 11, F, LR).

Winning

Participants generally considered it common for gambling adverts to depict people winning, e.g. *"It's always people winning"* (Int 14, M, HR). A common view was that advertising made it seem easy to win, e.g. *"In all of the different companies' ads it always lands on the jackpot because that appeals to people"* (Int 3, M, LR).

Further, by showing what could be won, the reactions of those who have won, and the lifestyle they could lead if they were to win, this presented an image of an outcome they could identify with and aspire to if they too were to engage with the gambling product being shown.

I personally have never seen an ad where they've shown somebody losing (Int 15, F, HR).

That's the whole draw, isn't it? They're trying to show you what you can win... and entice you to play (Int 12, F, HR).

Serious gamblers would be saying like 'Well, you know if that person can win, that means I can win' (Int 10, M, LR).

It probably wouldn't catch your attention so much if you weren't seeing, the actually, what possibly could be won or what somebody is winning at the moment and you automatically think, 'oh that could be me' (Int 4, F, HR).

However, some participants questioned the winning narrative, especially in adverts showing large sums of money being won through online slots, casino games and spin-to-win formats.

The ads say that all these people win but like you know that they don't win so there's no point really in engaging in it (Int 7, M, HR).

Everybody's a winner but, until you start putting your money in (Int 5, F, LR).

Marketing features

Several participants made reference to aspects of gambling marketing considered to help attract attention and potential consumers. These included the use of bright colours, large or bold fonts, and familiar sounds.

I think the whole slots thing is the interactive and the music and the sounds and, especially when you win and you hear all those coins and stuff like that. So I do think that's a powerful ad if you have played the slots before and you know those sounds and they're quite familiar (Int 4, F, HR).

A lot of the time they're bright colours, the adverts like during a football match its usually the first advert on after so your attention is still there, it takes a minute for your attention to switch (Int 16, M, HR).

Capital letters, they stand out, it kind of draws your attention towards it (Int 3, M, LR).

The use of celebrities, sports personalities, characters and cartoons were also viewed as attention-grabbing.

The use of such a well-known figure as Jose Mourinho being the manager of many football teams would catch your attention anyway regardless of the ad content (Int 4, F, HR).

They use a familiar face, like a celebrity's face which makes it seem like it's so credible (Int 5, F, LR).

Behavioural impact

Marketing influence by type of gamble

Several participants had established patterns of gambling, with many reluctant to engage with other forms or formats of gambling when presented with promotional marketing, e.g. *"The only one I'm interested in is the bingo... I've often got stuff from Paddy Power saying you're entitled to like 50 or 60 like spins and I wouldn't go near it"* (Int 15, F, HR). This was apparent for those opting for land-based over online betting, sports betting compared to more interactive gambling (slots, bingo, or casino), and betting before a match as opposed to in-play.

At this stage I'm not really going to start using online gambling, I'm going to just keep with my way of going into the shops (Int 1, M, HR).

I call myself a high gambler, a big gambler, and I know what I'm going to gamble on. I'm not going to be going looking at specials and seeing things like that, I'm going to be going in, I'm going to be looking at the horses and I'm going to be saying right I fancy Smoking Gun at 10 to 1 (Int 14, M, HR).

I don't want to know the odds of a cricket game or whatever, like I'm not interested in that. So I only have things selected like lottery and I do have horse racing events and the football (Int 5, F, LR).

Some participants stated that they would be more inclined to engage with promotions similar to their preferred/current gambling activities if they were familiar with the brand or person advertising, format of gamble, or if it was available in Ireland.

If that were the national lottery, the Irish lotto it would make me read it yeah. Yeah it would make me read it if I was familiar with the company (Int 13, M, HR).

People promote certain betting companies on YouTube like, or influencers on Instagram, and they'd be promoting it and because you've watched these people and you kind of have a liking towards them I feel like more so then I'd consider trying it (Int 3, M, LR).

Gambling marketing as a prompt

Prompts to bet included adverts, direct marketing, information regarding potential prizes, and seeing logos or merchandise for gambling brands. Two high-risk gamblers mentioned recall of gambling adverts acting not as an immediate prompt but as a cue should they subsequently be near a gamble venue, e.g. *"If I saw an ad and then I was walking past a bookies then I might, I might pop in because it would be in my head"* (Int 7, M, HR).

When we're watching football games in the pub there's like ads all around the football pitch for gambling and then it kind of like jogs my memory to be like, 'oh we should place a bet on this game' (Int 6, M, LR).

What tends to kind of trigger, get me to go... would be radio ads, television ads, you know saying, 'This jackpot for the EuroMillions is 100 million this, this week, you know, guaranteed winner' (Int 10, M, LR).

Seeing or hearing offers or promotions appeared to be particularly important in prompting betting, with most participants stating that they would take advantage of, or had previously engaged with, offers seen in gambling marketing, e.g. *"I would bet £10 to get £30 just for that short space of time, to place a few bets, so it would entice me"* (Int 12, F, HR). These included signing up with different or multiple brands e.g. *"Paddy Power and Ladbrokes and... I think I've done Boyle Sports as well. I think I just joined them just so I could get the 50 quid worth of bets"* (Int 9, M, HR), or downloading apps, as a consequence of new customer offers, free bets or spins, enhanced odds or price boosts for in-play betting, and special bonuses.

If I'm already a member and they would have specials, you know, higher odds than other bookmakers and stuff, I have availed of those (Int 4, F, HR).

It does actually prompt me to bet. When it's like a special offer, if they're offering you something then yes. But if it's just a normal advert where there's actually like, you know, it's not a special offer than that wouldn't prompt me to bet (Int 2, F, LR).

It does prompt you if they are promoting something and it looks good and you have money there at the time and you think 'oh I could double or treble this' (Int 4, F, HR).

The only time I would bet, which would be once I'd see these kind of promotions about a particular event, and, that would kind of prompt me to go and check it out (Int 3, M, LR).

Betting more than intended

Several participants said there was a greater likelihood that they would bet or deposit more than intended if they were to benefit from an offer or promotion that enabled further opportunities to gamble, an increased chance of winning, or a greater return on a single stake. These offers included free bets, different odds, price boosts, specials and extra lotto draws (e.g. at Christmas).

Exactly what I'm saying there, the half time thing, if they put a special on it and you were going to put a tenner on it, if they put a special on it you are probably going to put twenty, I know I would (Int 14, M, HR).

Possibly because it (the ad) could be saying about like, I said, a boost on the price or whatever you know and you think, Jesus that's a great price I'll put on more than I anticipated because I'll win more (Int 16, M, HR).

If it's kind of bet 20 and get whatever, how many bets free, whereas usually I'd just do a fiver bet or two fiver bets, you know, something like that. But if I'm getting free bets for that little bit more then it would, yes, persuade me to spend more (Int 2, F, LR).

Gambling regulation

Whistle-to-whistle ban

There was general support for a ban on gambling marketing shown from five minutes before a sporting event starts to five minutes after it concludes. It was felt that this would help to better safeguard young people, remove the temptation of in-play marketing (seen as particularly important as watching sports heightens emotions), and ultimately reduce gambling in Ireland.

You'd have people betting during the match wouldn't you, and stuff like that, so yeah that's good (Int 15, F, HR).

Maybe it does encourage a lot of people to like just gamble on their phones and stuff like that, I suppose that would make sense in that case... there is so many young people just watching TV and they could be like subconsciously influenced by the ads (Int 1, M, HR).

That's a good idea to stop kind of problem betting on a game that's already going on (Int 6, M, LR).

Several participants were sceptical however, deeming the timing insufficient or suggesting that even with a whistle-to-whistle ban in place exposure to gambling marketing remains high.

9pm, there's plenty of events that are on after, as well like 5 minutes before it's not long, there's plenty of time before (Int 16, M, HR).

I feel like I still see so much (Int 5, F, LR).

When informed that it was voluntary and did not apply to horse or greyhound racing, some participants pointed out that this is understandable as racing is based on gambling, livelihoods are at stake, and young people tend not to watch racing. These participants still viewed it as a step in the right direction. In general, however, participants typically questioned the value, e.g. *"If it's not mandatory it seems a bit futile"* (Int 6, M, LR), considered it open to breaches, or viewed it as a cynical attempt by gambling companies to suggest that they are on the side of customers rather than driven by a financial imperative.

It should apply to everything rather than just football, that doesn't make sense to me (Int 2, F, LR).



Not as serious in that way because I feel like yes maybe some would scale it back but I feel like a good few as well wouldn't (Int 1, M, HR).

A pointless rule, like it definitely isn't going to make it have any effect. I think that just sounds like something the gambling companies have agreed on to like let them keep doing what they're doing, like, but making it seem like they're trying to change (Int 8, M, LR).

It should be legislation across the board. You know, obviously some companies will, will use it as, to be seen to be you know mitigating the dangers of, of gambling, and they'll probably publicise the fact that they're doing it you know to, to get a bit of, a bit of recognition (Int 10, M, LR).

Opt-in

Having to opt-in to receive gambling marketing via different channels (email, phone, text and social media) was viewed very positively, described as 'fabulous', 'brilliant' and 'great'. It was explained that those wanting to opt-in could do so but without others having to receive unsolicited information, particularly on social media, which they mentioned as being extremely popular with young people.

Brilliant idea, definitely, because if you've personally opted in then you're obviously looking for this kind of stuff and if you haven't then, you know, you're not going to be prompted because you're not going to be shown it (Int 4, F, HR).



It could be beneficial to people and I'd be delighted not to see that still popping up every two seconds. The amount of stuff, as I say like, for someone who is signed up to two apps, one for lotto and one who is like a betting thing, it's colossal... I can definitely see that being a positive, definitely like, it's regulated, it's controlled, like they can't just pop out gambling stuff any time of the day or anywhere (Int 5, F, LR).

Participants said that being out of sight, and therefore out of mind, would help protect new customers, vulnerable populations (children, younger people, those experiencing gambling-related harms), and those looking to reduce their gambling, e.g. *"Very clever to have to opt into that, so children aren't just inherently like predisposed to it"* (Int 11, F, LR). One participant suggested that although opt-in has merit, those under 18 should not be exposed in the first instance.

Kind of exploiting people who have just kind of maybe just had a look, like myself, a look at the odds and then get bombarded everywhere you go on the internet after, for the next few hours before a game kicks off about betting (Int 15, F, HR).

If people are like struggling with any forms of addiction and stuff it would be easier to know that you're not going to be swayed by what you see as a result of clicking on any random video. I feel like that's also fairly good because people are swayed and it is something people can get very addicted to and, especially if you're trying to quit and you see something like that I think it could be very damaging (Int 1, M, HR).

That is great like and especially, as I say, for people who do have like issues with or maybe do gamble a lot more, the more ads they see the more triggered they are to do more (Int 5, M, LR).

It should be kind of like compulsory that people under 18 can't see it, like they should be automatically blocked... I saw the ads when I was obviously 16 and then that probably, that and my friends probably enticed me to gamble (Int 7, M, HR).

Self-exclusion

The consensus view was that individuals who self-exclude from stores or online should not receive any marketing materials during the self-exclusion period. One participant assumed it was already law. Some high-risk gamblers who had previously self-excluded considered doing so beneficial, and summed up the general view, which was that *"If you have (self-excluded) you shouldn't be receiving anything"* (Int 4, F, HR). It was seen as common sense that individuals looking to control their gambling or stop gambling should not be put at risk by being sent any potentially enticing communications from gambling companies.

It's not kind of exploiting people who have just kind of maybe just had a look, like myself, a look at the odds and then get bombarded everywhere you go on the internet after, for the next few hours before a game kicks off about betting (Int 10, M, LR).

On Paddy Power I opted into 'Take a break' for a few months... I think that should be like a law because if the person has acknowledged they have a problem, you know, the gambling authorities should realise ok this person actually needs a bit of a cool- out period (Int 7, M, HR).

It's only fair that they don't try and antagonise you to go back and maybe go to a shop or whatever (Int 14, M, HR).

Complete ban on gambling marketing

There were mixed views with respect to a total gambling marketing ban. Those supportive pointed out that people would still be able to gamble but it would remove a lure. Doing so was thought to help protect youth, non-gamblers and those considering gambling, e.g. *"For the safety of kids it would probably be best if they did"* (Int 14, M, HR), given that gambling advertising was seen to normalise and promote gambling.

I believe gambling is a negative and it's not really something you'd, it's not healthy, so I feel like the less it's promoted the better, and if it's totally banned from being broadcast I'd say it's definitely more of a positive (Int 3, M, LR).



I just think it's too easy for that kind of stuff to be picked up by the wrong person and when I say that I mean somebody young (Int 13, M, HR).

It would get rid of the people who are on edge or first-time gamblers so it would be, yes I'd be in favour of it because the people that are already gambling, they'll still gamble (Int 7, M, HR).

Those opposed to, or unsure about, a complete ban were more likely to be low-risk gamblers. It was argued that it was too extreme, gambling companies are legitimate businesses, and only adults are legally permitted to gamble. Some participants stated that gambling and addiction will occur irrespective of marketing, and that it would represent a discordance between gambling and other potentially addictive behaviours such as alcohol. For some participants, their disapproval of, or uncertainty about, a complete gambling marketing ban appeared however to be linked, in part, to the belief that gambling companies would find a way to circumvent it.

I know it can be serious and people can get really addicted and whatever but I think that could be the case whether gambling was advertised or not (Int 2, F, LR).



It's unfair if you're banning gambling and not banning stuff like alcohol... there's no harm in banning it because it inherently is addictive and stuff like that and causes people a lot of problems but 'do I see it happening, no' (Int 16, M, HR).

I wouldn't really agree with that. I don't know, I feel like gambling companies would either still find like some sort of way to promote their business (Int 6, M, LR).

Several participants disagreed with a complete ban but favoured lesser marketing restrictions, which were sometimes specified, e.g. banning gambling adverts on TV.

I wouldn't be totally against it, but I think it's gone a bit too far... A bit here and there but not like, not completely banning it (Int 9, M, HR).



I think that would be very drastic... by all means give people the opportunity to opt out themselves, restrict it, but I think an outright ban is kind of a bit, a bit too far (Int 10, M, LR).

They're just making it look like it's all like rainbows and stuff, you know? Yes, definitely take (ads) off the TV (Int 8, M, LR).

Salience of gambling messaging

Several participants felt that the industry messaging was neither prominent nor displayed on broadcast media for a sufficient time, e.g. *"It's not helpful because they're talking about gambling for the whole thing and then that tiny little bit at the end, people are not going to focus on that"* (Int 15, F, HR). Highlighting the lack of salience, despite participants being shown an advert during the interview which ended with the 'When the fun stops stop' message (displayed at the bottom of the screen for the last eight seconds of the ninety second advert) several could not recall having ever seen this message. In contrast, the novel messages shown, which covered approximately 25 percent of the advert, were considered to increase visibility as well as detract from the advert. One participant also suggested that the bold black used for the wording of the novel messages stood out, in contrast with industry messaging.

They'll put it on like the faint setting, yes, like just a faint grey colour, so it's like covered up. It's not in bold black like that with the yellow background, that just grabs your attention right away (Int 8, F, LR).



Message theme

Industry

There were mixed views of industry messaging. For several participants the 'When the fun stops stop' message was considered strong and direct, and the 'Take time to think' message thought to encourage more responsible gambling, e.g. *"I think something like that would influence people to be more responsible"* (Int 3, M, LR). The general view, however, was that these messages were vague and open to interpretation. Several participants were sceptical as they were considered too small, only shown at the end of adverts on broadcast media, and fleeting. In addition, the larger font size used to highlight the word fun in the 'When the fun stops stop' message was seen as promotional, e.g. *"It's a bit weird with like the fun like kind of highlighted, like a casino. It would almost remind you to gamble"* (Int 6, M, LR). The 'Take time to think' was typically seen as too vague, impersonal, not gambling specific, and not sufficiently striking to make a meaningful difference. The inclusion of these messages was viewed as a tick-box exercise rather than a meaningful attempt to help consumers.

It's (the word fun) all highlighted and bubbly and everything. That's the wrong way to say when the fun stops stop, it should be in bold black writing... it's really like they are turning around and giving the fingers to the regulators (Int 14, M, HR).

Straightaway it jumps out as 'fun', and then 'gamble aware' underneath, you know kind of, I don't know it, it's meant to be saying 'When the fun stops stop' but it kind of just says 'fun' (Int 10, M, LR).

It's like gone in about two or three seconds you know, but they do have that faint tiny writing down the bottom just to cover themselves, you know, so it's like probably just a legality thing... it's like reading terms and conditions, you know, no one reads them like, they make them as small and hard to read as possible (Int 8, M, LR).

Take time to think doesn't really mean anything to me... like think about what? (Int 2, F, LR).

Humour

The use of messaging intended to be humorous divided opinion, partly based on how the message was interpreted. Not all viewed the messages as funny, e.g. for one participant the message about 'the best strategy being not to gamble' was considered serious and discomforting, *"It just makes you uncomfortable with how direct it is, and it does really make you evaluate like, like, how much you put into it"* (Int 1, M, HR). For those that viewed the messaging as witty, which was often the case for the 'double your money' message, this was considered light-hearted and satirical and thought to increase engagement and recall.

Because it's funny it would grab your attention (Int 7, M, HR).

If I was like to talk about betting I could hear someone saying that to me (Int 3, M, LR).

I would say it would make this one a bit more memorable (Int 6, F, LR).

The general view, however, was that these types of messages fail to mention, or minimise, the potential negative consequences of gambling, e.g. *"A real sort of dad joke... I think you downplay it more"* (Int 16, M, HR). For some, it was viewed as more akin to industry messaging.

Doesn't really tell you to the dangers of gambling (Int 10, M, LR).

This has got more humour to it and it isn't as shocking (Int 1, M, HR).

Making light of a, I don't know, dark situation (Int 8, M, LR).

One participant felt that this style of messaging could be a deterrent, but in general humour-based messages were not thought to discourage gambling. For both messages it was suggested that they may act as a prompt to challenge the underlying assertions, i.e. about the gambling industry always winning and how best to double your money.

That one's actually quite funny, quite witty actually, but again I don't think it's enough (Int 5, F, LR).

You would laugh but I don't think you'd have people take that seriously (Int 14, M, HR).

Quite funny actually... I don't know if that's really gonna make much of a difference (Int 10, M, LR).

Multiple harms

The multiple harms message was viewed by some as too vague, generic and quite cumbersome. Several, mostly female, participants however considered it straightforward, realistic, and felt it important to describe the myriad harms that gambling can be associated with.

More generic and broad... it doesn't really stick in your mind (Int 1, M, HR).

That makes you think about like a lot more aspects than just losing money, like yeah, the emotional and the financial problems definitely come with it... it affects like all aspects of your life. I think that would be a great one (Int 11, F, LR).

Would stay in someone's head put it that way, they'd read it and they'd walk away and they'd be kind of like, wow, like serious personal, social, like the impact (Int 5, F, LR).

Family

While some participants without children considered the messaging relating to the impact of gambling on families irrelevant, in general it was seen as accurate, direct, serious and helpful. Participants typically felt that the messaging was attention grabbing and thought-provoking, e.g. *"It makes you think about who else you're affecting by gambling... it will make people think, like, you know most people's priority is their family and a disease, once you see that word its, your brain switches on and it's something serious"* (Int 16, M, HR). The messages were thought to make gambling less fun and instead highlight the potential negative impacts, not just to the individual but significant others, particularly among high-risk gamblers.

This one is really good because I feel like it's very easy to think just as yourself as a unit... I think that would just be very sobering (Int 1, M, HR).

It makes it seem less kind of like a fun thing and more like a serious thing, more of a problem (Int 6, M, HR).

It's good, it's very close down, it's quite hard, we can all beat around the bush, tell it how it is. If one suffers a lot of people can suffer, absolutely right (Int 14, M, HR).

Mental health

The mental health messages were seen as strong and hard-hitting, particularly among high-risk gamblers. It was felt that such messages are necessary to raise awareness and highlight how problems linked to gambling can escalate. Some low-risk participants viewed mention of suicide as too extreme or suggested this be omitted.

It's just letting you know that it's linked to your poor health and your, your mental health and depression (Int 12, F, LR).

That's like a very strong powerful message like. No one's going to ignore that if you see that like, that just catches people's attention like. It's actually serious and straight to the point (Int 8, F, LR).

No-one likes seeing the mention of suicide on anything, so it could be a bit, a bit much... I'd probably leave out the suicide (Int 10, M, LR).

The suicide among men message was generally seen as credible, powerful, stark, and appropriately targeted given that men are most likely to gamble, suffer from gambling problems, and fail to discuss their mental health. It was seen as helpful to capture the attention of gamblers and families, prompt discussion, and deter children. However, it was considered to contain too much information which, as a consequence, may reduce engagement, e.g. *"There's too much reading in that"* (Int 5, F, LR).

That's good and it's targeting men. I think men are less likely to come forward when they have mental health problems... I do see a lot of young men gambling and you always wonder what the long-term effects of it would be and I have heard personally of a lot of, I haven't personally heard of any women committing suicide due to gambling debts and stuff, but I have with men (Int 4, F, HR).

Suicide is a huge issue and when you relate gambling so closely with suicide you know, like, as it does there, I think it might make people think a bit more. It might make people ask the question about, the big thing now in society is 'oh look there's no stigma attached to talking about your mental health, talk about this, talk about that', so maybe this is trying to as well remove the stigma of talking about betting by relating it to mental health (Int 16, M, HR).

It's the elephant in the room like, it's 'Jeez, do you bet much?', 'Yeah, I bet every night', 'No way, I never knew that', like it's opened a conversation (Int 9, M, HR).

Resource information

Signposting gambling-related resources such as a helpline number and website was considered warranted, e.g. *"The helpline, and the problem gambling.ie, that should be included in all of them"* (Int 3, M, HR). It was deemed helpful for everyone but particularly those that may be experiencing problems, e.g. *"You not only have the website but you've got a phone number as well that you can actually speak to somebody or get more information and it's, if it helps one person, that's enough"* (Int 4, F, HR). Indeed, for several participants this was viewed as essential for all gambling adverts to allow people access to more information or check if they are in control.

If the phone number's there or the website, maybe if someone went on to it or phoned up, it could help them, but without the phone number there, or the website, they might think about it but they'd go back to their old ways the next day (Int 9, M, HR).

You're watching (the game) you still get very anxious, so you'd be looking around, so you know that's kind of a great time where, a time where it kind of goes through your head being like, 'oh, is this the right thing to do?' and I think to have like a number there it'd be like, 'Ok, I might just, you know, maybe I am having an issue with this' (Int 11, F, LR).

If they go on the website it could have more like indicators if they are in control or not... you can reach out, figure out like solutions to your problems (Int 1, M, HR).

The value was thought to differ depending on mode of delivery, considered less effective for static marketing materials (e.g. posters) than for online advertisements, where an individual could easily click on a link on their device to be redirected to the website or, if using a phone, to ring the helpline number. Being on online ads was also thought to be useful as this was seen as more effective at targeting young people.

If you're seeing that ad you're not missing the problem gambling phone number (Int 16, M, HR).

That would be good on like a mobile or on a laptop because then you can, then you'd be able to click on the number and call them or click on the website and look at it. But if it was like in a betting shop you wouldn't, you wouldn't really call the number or you wouldn't go onto the website (Int 7, M, HR).

Options for strengthening messaging

Many participants suggested ideas for strengthening the message when prompted, although some proposed these spontaneously. Ideas included having an information message on a standalone advertisement, or having the warning shown throughout the advert, akin to breaking news captions, e.g. ***"Banners that you have on the news, like breaking news, if they had some sort of a running statement along the bottom of the ad"*** (Int 9, M, HR). Another suggestion was to show an advert about the harms of gambling following a promotional advert, or have the message presented verbally as this could better capture the attention of people who do not look at the screen when adverts are shown.

Keep that solid yellow square at the bottom of the ad like with that message and say like the website link, that would probably be a better way than just showing it for like two seconds at the end of a website (Int 8, M, LR).

If they showed the ad or whatever, the promotion and then the next ad, the next one to be something like this (referring to one of the novel messages) (Int 15, F, HR).

Why is it not in block capitals you know, like one of those sentences, why is that not on the bottom of the screen all the time when the ad is on? (Int 13, M, HR).

No participant proposed a theme different to those they were shown, but in terms of the message style or content, several participants suggested the use of testimonials, as these may help to personalise problems and make the message more relatable. Others proposed the use of statistics to illustrate whatever point was being made, for instance about the proportion of gamblers that develop problems as a result of their gambling.

If anything there could be like just a really short quick testimonial about how like gambling has affected someone's life. That would be a really powerful thing to see (Int 1, M, HR).



Statistics are something that would always make you go oh, ok (Int 5, F, LR).

Stats maybe as well, like you know figures for instance on this, maybe figures on young suicide, suicide rates, you know like just something like that (Int 16, M, HR).

It was also suggested that whatever messages are shown, they should be designed and mandated by government.

If they're sending messages out like that, I think it should be on a more government kind of basis rather than the companies being responsible for it (Int 2, F, LR).



5

Discussion



5. Discussion

The young adult gamblers in this study reported high and frequent (often daily) exposure to gambling marketing. Research in the UK with young adult gamblers similarly found that they reported their day-to-day experiences to be 'saturated' with gambling adverts (Torrance et al., 2021). While exposed to gambling marketing in multiple channels, we found that this was most commonly reported for television and social media. Just as Killick and Griffiths (2022) found that sports betting ads on social media were seen as 'intrusive', we found that for some participants gambling marketing, which was considered common across multiple social media platforms, was viewed as inescapable. Such routine exposure, in different environments and while engaging in day-to-day activities, is thought to help normalise gambling (Thomas et al., 2018; Nyemcsok et al., 2021; Thomas, McCarthy et al., 2023).

Gambling marketing can shape how gambling is perceived. Gambling companies often use humour in advertising, with Paddy Power criticised in Ireland for doing so (Kerr et al., 2021). It is suggested that light-hearted advertising may generate interest, create positive brand attitudes, normalise and encourage gambling, and downplay potential risks (Killick & Griffiths, 2023). We found that participants viewed humorous adverts as giving the impression that gambling was fun, easy and entertaining; these types of ads also prompted discussion with others. Gambling advertising frequently shows winning (McMullan & Miller, 2009; Derevensky et al., 2010; Abarbanel et al., 2017), which was considered the norm among our sample. While some participants considered this as lacking credibility, as it does not reflect reality, in general exposure to adverts showing what could be won, the reactions of winners, and the lifestyle winning could offer, presented an image they felt that they could aspire to if they too were to engage with the gambling product shown.

Almost all participants recalled a range of gambling-related offers and promotions, comprising new customer/sign-up offers, free or matched bets or spins, price offers and bonuses, time-limited bets and offers, specific bets or odds, risk minimising offers, jackpots, prizes, and loyalty/rewards schemes. There are likely others not identified given that research in Australia found 15 categories of gambling-related financial inducements (Hing et al., 2017). Participants in our study commented that some of these offers and promotions may encourage people to sign up with multiple companies (e.g. new customer offers), bet more or more frequently (e.g. loyalty schemes where the size of the free bet is influenced by the number of times that a person has bet, and the amount they have bet, in the preceding week), or are an enticement to gamble (e.g. time-limited offers). Several participants were sceptical of offers and promotions, however, or questioned the salience of the terms and conditions, described as being shown in small text or missing entirely. A content analysis of gambling adverts in the UK found that with respect to terms and conditions, at least where these were present, most appeared in small fonts and outside the main advert frame (Critchlow et al., 2020). The complexity of these terms and conditions, if visible, has also been raised as a concern (Hing et al., 2017).

Several participants said that they felt prompted to place a bet as a response to seeing or hearing gambling marketing, that they would or had taken advantage of offers and promotions, and that they would bet or deposit more than intended if they were to benefit from an offer or promotion. Two high-risk gamblers mentioned adverts being a delayed prompt to gamble, for instance if they had seen an advert or adverts and were

subsequently near to a gamble venue. This type of cueing effect has been previously reported (Torrance et al., 2021). The findings are consistent with the broader literature, which suggests that exposure to gambling advertising may encourage more frequent or riskier gambling (Browne et al., 2019; Newall et al., 2019). A meta-analysis found that, despite limitations in the included research, exposure to gambling advertising is likely associated with increases in gambling and problem gambling behaviour (Bouguettaya et al., 2020). Two subsequent online surveys with 16-24 year-olds, and regular adult sports bettors, found that almost a third of current gamblers (31% and 29% respectively), and 87% of those experiencing gambling harms, reported that marketing had prompted unplanned gambling spend (Wardle et al., 2022).

Regulations

Participants were generally favourable of the industry's voluntary whistle-to-whistle ban, which was seen to offer greater protection to young people and adults by removing the temptation of in-play marketing. In the UK, where a whistle-to-whistle ban was introduced in 2019, there is some evidence to suggest that it may be reducing exposure. Data from the Advertising Standards Authority has shown that the average number of adverts related to sports betting seen by children under 16 years of age has fallen from 0.7 to 0.3 per week (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2023). There was scepticism, however, among participants, with the timeframe (5 minutes before a sporting event starts until 5 minutes after it ends) considered insufficient. Columb et al (2020) found that while gambling adverts were most commonly observed during in-game advert breaks (in 72% of advert breaks), they were also common in advert breaks up to 30 minutes before matches started (66%) and in adverts up to 30 minutes after matches ended (45%). While the study does not provide details on the exact timing of the pre- and post-game adverts it is highly probable that many would not be captured by the whistle-to-whistle ban. Participants also mentioned that even with this measure gambling marketing remains high, and for some it was seen as a cynical attempt by gambling companies to suggest a desire to safeguard consumers.

Premier League football clubs recently agreed to remove gambling sponsorship from the front of shirts, which will further reduce exposure to gambling marketing for consumers in Ireland, given that English football is popular in the country (Kerr et al., 2021). However, it will not come into force until 2026, does not extend to the lower football leagues in England, and will still be permitted on the sleeves of shirts and pitchside hoardings (The Guardian, 2023); the latter was often mentioned by participants in this study, with one participant stating that pitchside adverts were a reminder to gamble. An analysis of five football matches found that gambling references were most common around the pitch border or within the area-of-play (e.g. branded shirts), with pitchside adverts accounting for 38% of the locations where gambling sponsors are seen (Purves et al., 2020). This suggests that the removal of gambling sponsorship from the front of shirts will only serve to reduce (rather than eliminate) exposure to gambling advertising during Premier League football matches. It is also possible that gambling operators may simply shift their marketing efforts, e.g. increasing stadium and boundary marketing (Thomas et al., 2023).

While not included in the Gambling Regulation Bill in 2022, the General Scheme of the Gambling Regulation Bill in 2021 mentioned a ban on the advertising of any licensed game, service, activity or product authorised under this Act on social media websites and apps, and by telephony, text message, email or any other remote means, except where a person has consented to receiving such advertising (Department of Justice, 2021). Participants

indicated that they regularly receive marketing through email, text and online, as has been found elsewhere (Hing et al., 2019), with online surveys finding past-month receipt of direct marketing to be associated with reporting that marketing had prompted unplanned spend (Wardle et al., 2022). An opt-in (rather than opt-out) requirement to receiving direct messages from gambling operators has been recommended (Hing et al., 2019). We found that participants were extremely favourable towards the notion of having to opt-in to receive gambling marketing via different channels (email, phone, text, social media), stating that those wanting to do so could without encumbering those who do not want to receive unsolicited marketing. Participants felt it would protect new customers, children, younger people, and those looking to reduce their gambling or experiencing gambling-related harms.

Previous evidence has suggested that self-exclusion can be helpful for those experiencing problems with their gambling (Miller, 2015), with many self-excluders reporting decreased gambling and improved psychological wellbeing (Gainsbury, 2014). However, treatment organisations in Britain indicate that exposure to gambling marketing during self-exclusion may limit effectiveness (Parke et al., 2014). Participants in our study stated that individuals who self-exclude from stores or online should not receive any gambling marketing during the self-exclusion period.

There was a mixed response to a complete ban on gambling advertising, as introduced in Italy (Tavazzani et al., 2022). Several participants were supportive as they felt it would protect younger people as advertising was seen as normalising gambling. For others it was too extreme as gambling companies are legitimate businesses, comparable products such as alcohol are not treated this way, and it was not thought to work. For some who did not think it would be effective this perspective appeared to be linked, in part, to the belief that gambling companies would circumvent it. Several participants favoured less stringent marketing restrictions, as has been found with gamblers in Spain (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2020).



Messaging

While some participants felt that the voluntary messages often shown on gambling adverts were direct, informative and helpful, these were generally criticised and considered of limited value as they were not shown for a sufficient period of time on broadcast media and not prominent. A content analysis of 300 gambling adverts in the UK found that 14% did not feature a voluntary message, with very poor visibility for most (54%) that did (Critchlow et al., 2020). Participants in this study also considered these messages an attempt to portray companies as corporate responsible citizens rather than help consumers, with the prominence and display of 'fun' in the 'When the fun stops stop' message viewed cynically as it was seen as promotional. Comparable 'responsible drinking' messages on alcohol containers have similarly been viewed as ambiguous, ineffective and ultimately an alcohol industry ploy (Davies et al., 2023).

In terms of alternative messages that could be included in gambling marketing, humour-based messages, particularly 'The best way to double your money is to fold it and put it back in your pocket', were considered memorable, with phraseology that people can retain desirable. However, it was not viewed as impactful as it minimised possible risks. The multiple risk message (personal, social, emotional and financial harm) received a mixed response, although for some highlighting the range of possible harms was viewed as appropriate. The messages about the potential impact of gambling on mental health, and on the family, were generally viewed as strong, attention grabbing, serious and thought-provoking, particularly among high-risk gamblers. There was a consensus that the inclusion of gambling-related resources (a helpline number and website) within gambling adverts was necessary, beneficial for the public in general and those experiencing harms in particular. The inclusion of a helpline number and/or website is a convenient mechanism for people to find more information. For instance, awareness of this information on cigarette packaging is associated with use (Thrasher et al., 2015; Moodie et al., 2021). Participants felt that this should be mandatory.

The general view was that messages needed to be designed independently of those with vested interests. This appears to be happening in the UK, with the Department of Media, Culture and Sport indicating in 2023 that they would, together with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Gambling Commission, and independent of the gambling industry, strengthen messaging within gambling advertising, including on risks associated with gambling (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2023).



Limitations

Our sample was limited to a small number of young adult low-risk and high-risk gamblers, which limits generalisability. The harmful effects of gambling advertising have been found to extend to children (Torrance et al., 2021), another key population (Rossi & Nairn, 2022) not included. It is possible that the findings were influenced by socially desirable responding. Additionally, the marketing materials shown during the interviews to aid discussion may have influenced or shaped participants' responses. The novelty of the messages, which were not professionally designed or tested, shown to participants may have influenced their responses. Further, the study provides no insight into how people would respond to messages on gambling marketing in the short-term and over time.

Future research

Given the absence of longitudinal studies on gambling marketing, in contrast to other potentially harmful products such as alcohol and tobacco (Bouguettaya et al., 2020), such research would be of significant value. However, as there is a dearth of research exploring gambling marketing in Ireland, there are also other more practical avenues. For instance, it would be of value to include people with lived experience of gambling harms and who are in recovery in future qualitative research as they are a population with high rates of relapse (Raylu & Oei, 2016), and one that has been largely neglected with respect to gambling marketing. Quantitative research exploring how different audiences (e.g. children) view gambling marketing and messaging about potential gambling harms in Ireland is clearly warranted. Research exploring a broader range of messages about gambling and potential gambling harms in marketing, and the optimal design of such messaging, is also an important area for future research. Finally, there is a need to explore a broader range of gambling-marketing related policies than covered in this project.



The Need for Research on Gambling Marketing and Its Impacts



Current Research Landscape

Lack of longitudinal studies on gambling compared to alcohol and tobacco.



Importance of Future Research

Longitudinal studies on gambling marketing are significantly needed.



Focus Areas for Future Research in Ireland

Evaluate how individuals of different ages and demographics with lived experience of gambling harms perceive gambling marketing and messaging about potential harms.



Messaging and Marketing Design

Research diverse messages about gambling and potential harms with an aim to find the optimal design for such messages.



Policy Exploration

Explore a wider range of gambling-marketing related policies beyond the current project's scope.

6

Conclusions



6. Conclusions

Knowledge of the extent of gambling harms in Ireland and the factors associated with these harms is limited (Fulton, 2019). Given the paucity of research the role of gambling marketing in contributing to these harms is unclear. This sample of low- and high-risk gamblers reported frequent exposure to gambling marketing through a number of channels. The high awareness of gambling adverts, offers and promotions, and the fact that gambling marketing was a topic of discussion for most participants, suggests it has become a regular part of people's lives. Indeed, for some it was considered difficult to avoid. Gambling marketing appeared to influence perceptions, giving the impression that gambling was fun and winning the norm, and behaviours, prompting people to gamble or gamble more often, primarily as a result of offers and promotions. There was an appetite for gambling-marketing controls. There is a need for evaluation of interventions aimed at tackling gambling-related harms that is independent of the gambling industry and industry-funded organisations (van Schalkwyk et al., 2021). This applies to messaging in gambling marketing aimed at informing consumers of the potential harms. Such messages need to be informed by evidence and designed and evaluated independently of those with competing interests.

Declaration of interests

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