

The experiences, motivations, and engagement behaviours of young adults who regularly watch gambling livestreams

What this research is about

Livestreaming through platforms such as TikTok Live and Twitch has become popular among young adults. It is estimated that people aged 18 to 24 make up 40% of Twitch's global audience. This demographic overlaps with the legal gambling age in many countries.

Gambling livestreams are among the most-watched categories. In gambling livestreams, content creators broadcast themselves engaging in gambling, while people watch and interact through live chat. Many streamers are sponsored by or are paid affiliates of gambling operators. Unlike traditional advertising, livestreams are highly engaging and interactive. People may experience streamers' emotions and reactions as if they were their own. Furthermore, the live broadcast creates a sense of shared social space and belonging. People may develop parasocial relationships, or one-sided emotional bonds that they form with streamers. These mechanisms can help explain the appeal of gambling livestreams and the influence that streamers have on young people.

This study used in-depth interviews to explore the meaning and value that young adults derive from watching gambling livestreams; their motivations for watching; and their engagement behaviours with such livestreams.

What the researchers did

This study followed the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) guidelines. The researchers interviewed 15 young adults aged 18

What you need to know

Gambling livestreams have emerged as a form of both digital entertainment and gambling promotion. The researchers interviewed 15 young adults who regularly watch gambling livestreams from the UK. The researchers identified three main themes from the interviews: (1) social experiences and vicarious excitement; (2) interactivity and building loyalty; and (3) the urge and harm paradox.

to 24 years old who reported regularly watching gambling livestreams (at least once a week) and gambling in the last 12 months.

The interviews took place through Teams between June and October 2024. The interviews explored motivations for watching gambling livestreams; perceptions and opinions about gambling livestreams; use of gambling livestream interactive features; impacts and personal meaning or value ascribed to these experiences.

What the researchers found

Most participants identified as male (73.3%). About 40% identified as White, 26.7% as Asian, and 20% as Black. Eight participants (53.5%) reported gambling more than 20 times in the past month. Based on the Problem Gambling Severity Index, eight participants (53.3%) had high risk of problem gambling, two had moderate risk, four had low risk, and one had no risk.

The researchers identified three main themes from the interviews:

(1) Social experiences and vicarious excitement

Participants mentioned that their motivation for watching gambling livestreams was driven by streamers' personality. The gambling activities served to build parasocial relationships, as people developed strong connections to the streamers. The livestreams created (para)social connections through shared risk-taking. Participants mentioned building 'trust' with streamers despite knowing that they were just strangers online. They described using streamers' gambling strategies when gambling themselves. Furthermore, witnessing high-stake gambles provided vicarious thrills, as streamers often bet amounts far exceeded what viewers could afford. The unedited nature of livestreams enhanced the viewing experience; participants were excited to witness the emotional reactions of streamers to gambling outcomes.

(2) Interactivity and building loyalty

Passive viewing was transformed into active participation, as people earned points for watching. This 'gamified loyalty' created a binding effect; participants described feeling satisfaction and commitment from accumulating points. Additionally, interactive predictive features altered the viewing experience, allowing people to predict gambling outcomes. Beyond the satisfaction of making correct predictions, it created psychological satisfaction of genuinely participating in the gambling experience.

(3) The urge and harm paradox

Participants often rationalized watching gambling livestreams as a way to reduce gambling urges and as safer than real gambling. Yet, participants also mentioned that watching gambling livestreams increased their urges to gamble. Witnessing large wins led to aspirational thinking that they could also win big. Participants were aware of gambling-related harm and deceptive practices in gambling livestreams. They acknowledged that streamers are often paid to gamble. Participants also noticed financial harms due to increased gambling participation after watching gambling livestreams.

The researchers developed a conceptual model of gambling livestream viewership. The model begins with motivations for viewing gambling livestreams. Once engaged, multiple elements in the livestream environment give rise to immersive experiences, which in turn increase gambling urges and behaviours.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to inform regulations and protective measures to address the risks associated with online gambling environments.

About the researchers

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