

Exploring target demographics and audience reach of online gambling advertisements in Ireland

What this research is about

Gambling advertising can influence gambling attitudes, behaviours, and intentions. Such advertisements can be found on television, social media, and in live sporting events. Some studies have found that people who see more gambling ads are more likely to report an increase in gambling.

When looking at the demographics of people who gamble, young men are a group which seems at risk for reporting gambling and experiencing gambling harms. Given the link between exposure to gambling advertising and experience of gambling harms, it is worth examining if gambling operators are specifically targeting ads towards young men.

In the current study, the researchers searched the Meta Ad Library to look for advertisements from licensed online gambling operators in Ireland that were run between March 2024 and February 2025. They examined the intended audience of those ads as well as their reach, defined as the number of unique accounts that saw the ads at least once.

What the researchers did

Meta is a technology company that owns large social networking sites and services such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Under EU law, Meta is required to provide national data about ads on its platforms, which it does through the Meta Ad Library. The researchers looked at publicly available data on gambling ads from the library.

First, the researchers produced a list of 88 online betting sites operating in Ireland. They looked for operators that had at least one advertisement

What you need to know

Young men are more likely to report gambling and problem gambling compared to other groups. Gambling advertising may play a role, given its effects on gambling attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. Gambling advertising is also embedded in sports culture. However, it is unknown if gambling ads are targeted towards young men.

In the current study, the researchers examined 411 gambling advertisements posted by licensed online gambling operators in Ireland. The data were obtained from the Meta Ad library. The researchers looked at the target audience of these ads alongside their reach.

Men were the target audience of 22% of the advertisements, with no ads specifically targeting women. A total of 18,389,653 accounts were reached by these advertisements, with the highest reach among young people aged 25 to 34 years. Moreover, gambling advertisements reached 2.3 more men than women.

between March 2024 and the time of the search. The most recent 20 ads from each operator were pulled for analysis. The researchers included both active and inactive advertisements.

After identifying relevant ads, a researcher noted:

- The target age of each ad, if any.
- The target gender of each ad, if any.
- The number of unique accounts located in Ireland that viewed each ad. Multiple views of an ad by the same account were counted once only.

A subset of the data was then verified by a second researcher.

What the researchers found

The initial list included 88 operators, of which 64 (73%) had a Meta Ad Library page and 24 (27%) had at least one ad on their page. A total of 411 ads were included in the analysis.

Of these 411 ads, 91 (or 22%) explicitly set men as their target demographic, 304 (74%) set “all” as their target demographic, and 16 (4%) did not specify a target. No ads specifically targeted women. Regarding age, the majority of ads (91%) set the upper age limit of their target demographic as 65 or 65+. Regarding the lowest age limit, 180 (44%) adverts set the lowest age limit at 18. Of those 180 ads, 55 (31%) specifically targeted men.

In total, the 411 advertisements reached 18,389,653 unique accounts. Of these accounts, 12,690,245 belonged to men and 5,458,438 belonged to women. This means gambling advertisements in Ireland reach men at a rate 2.3 times greater than women. The majority of views came from ads that did not specifically target men.

The accounts reached most by these advertisements belonged to people between the ages of 25 and 34, totalling 6,246,408 accounts or 34% of all accounts that had seen these ads at least once. There were 4,701,885 accounts that belonged to people 35 to 44 years that were reached by these advertisements, totalling 26% of all accounts reached.

The most viewed advertisement featured a description of safer gambling tools alongside footage of gambling, such as slots. The top five most viewed ads were created by just two operators.

How you can use this research

This research suggests that young men are most exposed to gambling advertisements, even when these ads are not directly targeted to them. This suggests that social media algorithms may be pushing gambling content towards young men. The findings can inform policy makers and researchers.

About the researchers

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Amanda Roberts is affiliated with the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at the University of Loughborough in Loughborough, England. Elena Petrovskaya, Nicole Khoo, and Amanda Roberts are also affiliated with the College of Health and Science at the University of Lincoln in Lincoln, England. For more information about this study, please contact Elena Petrovskaya at ep556@cam.ac.uk.

Citation

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About Greo Evidence Insights

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