

## Gambling content marketing is appealing but not easily recognizable as advertising to children

### What this research is about

Gambling advertisements are common on social media. Content marketing advertisements are designed to blend in with other content, which makes them harder to recognize as advertising. Furthermore, the use of humour, memes, and cultural references may make content marketing more emotionally appealing.

This study is guided by the Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing. The model suggests that people have limited attention and mental resources. When advertisements are highly emotional or entertaining, they can take up this attention, making it harder to think critically or recognize that the content is actually advertising. This may be especially true for youth, whose decision-making skills are still developing. Educational programs aim to equip youth with the skills needed to recognize and resist gambling advertising. However, their effects have been limited.

In this study, the researchers looked at whether content marketing advertisements are more appealing to children than conventional gambling advertisements and the extent to which children can recognize them as advertising. The researchers also looked at whether a school-based gambling educational program could reduce the appeal of content marketing and increase recognition.

### What the researchers did

The researchers conducted an in-person experimental study with 58 children between 13 and 17 years old who were attending a large state-funded school in northeast England. The children were

### What you need to know

In this study, the researchers looked at the emotional appeal and recognizability of gambling content marketing among children. The researchers recruited 58 children between 13 and 17 years old from a school in northeast England. The children were split into a treatment or control group depending on whether they had completed a workshop providing education on gambling advertising. They completed an experiment in which they viewed content marketing and conventional advertisements for gambling. Appeal was based on self-reported rating of each advertisement as negative or positive, and physiological arousal when viewing the advertisement.

Gambling content marketing advertisements were more appealing to the children than conventional gambling advertisements. Most children could not recognize content marketing as advertising. Moreover, the educational program did not reduce the appeal of content marketing nor improve recognition.

recruited through YGAM, the leading charity in the UK for preventing gambling and gambling harms in young people. The study took place in October 2022.

Participants were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group. Those in the treatment group completed a school-based educational program delivered by YGAM a week before participating in the experiment. The program was a 45-minute workshop aimed at increasing understanding of gambling advertising and awareness of gambling

harms. The control group did not receive any formal education on these topics.

During the experiment, all participants viewed a series of social media posts on a computer. These posts included eight advertisements posted on the Twitter/X accounts of five UK-based gambling operators that were selected to represent content marketing advertisements (e.g., memes and humorous posts with indirect links to gambling) and conventional gambling advertisements (e.g., posts showing odds and promotions). The other eight posts were non-advertising social media posts.

Each post was shown briefly in random order, and participants rated how positive or negative they felt about each. To capture their automatic emotional reactions, physiological arousal was recorded using sensors attached to their non-dominant hand. After viewing all posts, participants rated whether they thought each post was an advertisement or not.

### What the researchers found

There were 34 girls and 24 boys. Among them, 28 participants were between 13 and 14 years old and 30 were between 16 and 17 years old.

Participants' appeal scores (based on self-reported rating and physiological arousal) significantly increased upon viewing content marketing advertisements compared to conventional advertisements for gambling. This indicates that content marketing was more appealing to children. Participants were also less likely to recognize content marketing advertisements as advertising compared to conventional advertisements.

The researchers then compared between participants in the treatment and control groups. Appeal scores for content marketing advertisements did not meaningfully differ between the two groups. In addition, there was no difference between the two groups in how appealing they found conventional gambling advertisements to be.

In both groups, most participants did not recognize any content marketing advertisements as advertising. Only 7% of participants were able to recognize all content gambling advertisements as advertising. Recognition of content marketing as

advertising did not meaningfully differ between the two groups. By contrast, almost all conventional gambling advertisements were recognized as such. These results suggest that the gambling education program did not have a major impact on reducing the emotional appeal of gambling content marketing, or increase children's recognition of this type of advertising.

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that gambling content marketing is appealing, but not easily recognizable as advertising to children. There is a need for more robust policy and educational measures to reduce the impacts of content marketing on youth.

### About the researchers

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### About Greo Evidence Insights

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