

Compliance of gambling adverts with regulation prohibiting targeting of young adults under 24 in the Netherlands

What this research is about

Gambling advertising on social media platforms may target people who are vulnerable to experiencing gambling-related harms, such as young adults. This targeting is based on their personal characteristics and user profiles. The Netherlands allows many forms of gambling, including online gambling, but only approved licensees can offer gambling products and services. Since 2023, Dutch gambling licensees are prohibited from targeting young adults under 24 years old with gambling ads.

The EU Digital Services Act requires large social media platforms to share databases of paid adverts shown, the intended target demographic groups, and the number of users reached. The Meta Ad library can be useful for policy evaluations to determine whether gambling licensees comply with regulations. The aim of this study was to examine whether Dutch gambling ads on social media illegally target young adults under 24 years old.

What the researchers did

The researchers first looked at the official register of licensees available on the website of the Netherlands' Gambling Authority, Kansspelautoriteit. They obtained a list of 30 online gambling licensees, which expanded into a list of 102 approved brand names, websites, and app names. The researchers also obtained a list of 525 offline gambling licensees with 47 associated brand names and websites. Then, the researchers entered each of these as search

What you need to know

There are growing concerns about the public health impact of gambling and the potential for social media advertising to target vulnerable groups using personal data and demographic profiling. In the Netherlands, gambling advertisements are not allowed to target young adults aged 18–23. The aim of this study was to examine whether Dutch gambling ads on social media illegally target young adults under 24 years old. Using data from the Meta Ad Library, the researchers analyzed 277 advertisements published by online and offline gambling licensees. Overall, most advertisements complied with the law, especially those published by online gambling operators. But a notable minority of advertisements illegally targeted young adults under 24.

terms into the Meta Ad Library, with the country filter set to Netherlands. They sampled up to 10 of the most recently published adverts from each account that advertised. They also recorded demographic information regarding whom the ad was meant to target and whom it reached.

While advertisers can set an age range for the target audience by selecting a minimum age and a maximum age, Meta only discloses fixed age brackets for the audience that was actually reached (i.e., 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64, and 65+). The researchers noted that there is some overlap between Meta's age bracket of 18–24-year-olds and the legal requirement that ads can only target those

aged 24 and above. Thus, an ad targeting people aged 24–65+ might seem illegal, as it might have been reported as reaching those aged 18–24, even though this had not occurred.

What the researchers found

The researchers analyzed 277 recent advertisements that were published by online and offline Dutch gambling licensees. Of this total, 220 ads were published by 22 online gambling licensees' accounts and 47 ads were published by 5 offline gambling licensees' accounts. Another 10 ads seemed to be published by Advance, which was licensed only for offline gambling. However, these ads advertised an online gambling app. This may be an example of illegal advertising of unlicensed online gambling.

Overall, most gambling ads complied with the law (92.7% of ads from online gambling licensees and 70.2% of ads from offline gambling licensees). However, a minority of ads were found to illegally target young adults aged 18 to 23. Online gambling ads were more likely to comply with the law than offline gambling ads. A total of 7.3% of online gambling ads (16 of 220) were non-compliant compared to 29.8% of offline gambling ads (14 of 47).

All non-compliant ads were published after the *De Groene Amsterdammer* report was published in July 2024. *De Groene Amsterdammer* is a Dutch news magazine that evaluated ads published by Dutch online gambling licensees on Meta-owned social media platforms. It was found that some licensees targeted young people between 18 and 23 years old. This study's findings suggest that some licensees continued to violate the law despite previous public scrutiny.

The reach data provided by Meta could not be used to accurately measure compliance due to the overlapping age ranges. But if the 18–24 reach was assumed to be distributed evenly across each year of age within this bracket, the researchers estimated that more than 5% of users reached by 3 of 16 (18.8%) online gambling ads that illegally targeted under-24s were likely 18 to 23-year-olds. Also, more than 5% of users reached by 10 of 14 non-compliant offline gambling ads (71.4%) and the one non-compliant Advance ad were likely under 24 years old.

How you can use this research

This study can inform policy makers, researchers, and Meta and other online platforms. It suggests a need for stricter enforcement of gambling advertising regulations. In addition, Meta could adopt platform-level changes to make it easier for gambling licensees to comply with regulations.

About the researchers

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Citation

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About Greo Evidence Insights

Greo Evidence Insights is an independent, non-profit organization specializing in research, knowledge mobilization, and evaluation in the health and well-being sectors. Greo transforms research and insights into actionable strategies to prevent and reduce harm related to gambling, gaming, technology use, and substance use. To learn more about funding for Research Snapshots visit [our website](#).

