The WAGER, Vol. 29(9) – The impact of celebrities and social media influencers in Australian gambling ads

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Gambling is an increasing public health concern for adolescents. Even though most countries do not allow those under the age of 18 to gamble, adolescents are regularly exposed to gambling through various media outlets. Many recent gambling advertisements posted on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok feature celebrities and social media influencers, which may particularly appeal to younger audiences. This week, The WAGER reviews a study by Hannah Pitt and colleagues that examined youth perceptions of celebrities and social media influencers in Australian gambling advertisements.

What were the research questions?

(1) How do young people perceive the use of celebrities and social media influencers in gambling advertisements?, and (2) How do these types of advertisements influence gambling attitudes among young people?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers recruited 64 adolescents aged 12 – 17 years from Victoria and New South Wales (NSW) in Australia during November 2021 – September 2022. They conducted 22 online focus groups with 2 to 4 participants in each group. Participants were asked about their views of celebrities in gambling ads and the influence of these ads on young people. Participants gave their recommendations for restricting the use of celebrities and influencers in gambling promotions. The authors then used thematic analysis to identify key themes from the focus groups.

What did they find?

Four key themes emerged. First, celebrities and influencers *increase the appeal of gambling advertisements* (see Figure). Participants suggested that advertisements featuring celebrities and influencers were more attention-grabbing and memorable because they provided a sense of familiarity. The second theme was that celebrities and influencers *increase the social acceptance of*

gambling. The use of celebrities in advertisements made it seem more acceptable to gamble and added credibility to the gambling company they were promoting. Many young people look up to and idolize celebrities, and participants were concerned that these types of ads might encourage young people to gamble. The third theme was that celebrities *reduce the perceived risks associated with gambling*. Participants commented that there were few ads in which celebrities emphasized the risks of gambling, which could contribute to gambling misconceptions among youth. The fourth theme was about *reducing the impact of celebrity and influencer gambling advertisements on young people*. Participants recommended that celebrities get more involved in educational gambling campaigns, and some even suggested completely restricting celebrities from promotional gambling advertisements to limit early exposure to gambling.

Figure. An overview of the four key themes that the researchers identified and relevant quotes from online focus group participants (n = 64). Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

The adolescents in this study voiced that the use of celebrities and influencers in gambling advertisements exposes young audiences to gambling, increases trust in gambling brands, and reduces perceived risks associated with gambling. These findings suggest that regulatory efforts—which have already been enacted in the United Kingdom, for example—are needed to protect youth from being influenced by gambling marketing. These regulatory requirements could include monitoring

all types of gambling marketing, restricting gambling accessibility (e.g., with strict age verification processes), and creating more public education campaigns (e.g., similar to the National Council on Problem Gambling's Safer Sports Betting Initiative).

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?
This study was conducted in two states in Australia, so the findings might not be generalizable to other countries with different gambling regulations and environments. Additionally, most participants were male, so they might have different perceptions and are typically more exposed to gambling compared to females.

For more information:
Individuals who are concerned about their gambling behaviors or simply want to know more about problem gambling may benefit from visiting the National Council on Problem Gambling or Gamblers Anonymous. Additional resources can be found at the BASIS Addiction Resources page.

— Annette Siu