

In a glimpse

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Online sports betting advertising content in France between 2014 and 2024

The legalisation of the online gambling market in 2010 was accompanied by the rapid spread of online betting among the general population, particularly among young people. Between 2011 and 2022, the proportion of 17-year-old gamblers betting online rose from 14.7% to 27.9%. This notable expansion coincided with significant advertising pressure. It is therefore essential to consider the advertising strategies implemented by gambling operators, while regulations aim at protecting problem gamblers and minors from commercial communications on gambling.

From February to July 2024, the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) conducted an original retrospective study, aiming at identifying the themes used in gambling advertising and examining them in the light of regulatory restrictions, recommendations from statutory control or self-regulatory bodies, as well as descriptors recurrently identified in the international scientific literature as potentially incentivising to minors. A corpus of advertisements relating to four major online sports betting operators – Betclik®, Unibet®, ParionsSport® and Winamax® – was collected on the Internet over the period 2014-2024 and in the Paris urban area in the run-up to the 2024 UEFA European Football Championship and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The study focused on advertisements circulated over a period ranging from between four and fourteen years after the entry into force of the initial regulatory provisions relating to gambling advertising.

This qualitative analysis of commercial communications promoting gambling focused on content without seeking to be exhaustive in the sampling for the period under scrutiny and without assessing the incentive (e.g., financial rewards) and algorithmic targeting mechanisms used to power the advertising impact. This is part of a new area of study undertaken by the OFDT to better understand the drivers behind sports betting, i.e. intrinsic motivations and environmental incentives, more specifically among young people and problem gamblers.

This briefing note presents the method applied by the OFDT and the results of this analysis of advertising themes identified in the commercial communications of major legal gambling operators in France in 2024. It provides a set of assessment criteria with the potential to enhance the monitoring of gambling advertising content.

- With the opening up of an online gambling market, advertising has been extensively utilised in this economic sector.
 - Since 2020, French law requires all gambling advertising to incorporate a warning message and prohibits any reference to minors or to other subjects that are particularly appealing either to them or to problem gamblers.
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- When analysing the content of advertisements promoting gambling, it is necessary to take these regulations into consideration in addition to criteria identified in the scientific literature as potentially encouraging gambling activities.
- Gambling advertising sometimes exploits the subjective nature of the scope of prohibited subjects.
- Some advertisements depict gambling behaviour that could be interpreted as problematic, as it is shown to be repeated and disregards the associated risks.
- Many graphic codes or references used in advertisements and other forms of commercial communication may evoke themes that are popular among minors.
- In gambling advertising, the prospect of earning easy money and achieving social status through gambling is often conveyed.

Final corpus

In total, 124 separate French advertisements circulated between 2014 and 2024 were collected and analysed using the coding grid that was created. The advertisements observed in public places between April and July 2024 were also available online. The advertisements collected via the Internet therefore constituted the reference corpus on which the analysis was based. This corpus included 57 advertisements for Betclic®, 36 for Winamax®, 22 for ParionsSport® and 9 for Unibet®. Approximately half of the total consisted of videos (49%) and the remainder were digital images, two of which were taken from a gambling operator's homepage banner or from photographed posters.

Among the 124 advertisements identified, 102 (82%) were in circulation after 2020, i.e. after the range of restrictions currently in force regarding the content of gambling advertising were enacted. For this subset of advertisements, the law-related analytical criteria were of particular interest. Finally, it should be recalled that this collection was not intended to be exhaustive.