

Social media advertising by sports betting companies and its influence on consumer behavior

Publicidad en redes sociales de las casas de apuestas deportivas y su influencia en el comportamiento del consumidor

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ABSTRACT

Advertising for sports betting platforms on digital platforms has experienced exponential growth in recent years, capturing the attention of young people in particular through social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube. The overall objective of this study was to analyze the influence of digital sports betting advertising on the consumption behavior of young users in Ecuador, particularly in terms of their exposure to and decision-making regarding these platforms. The study employed a quantitative methodological approach supplemented by qualitative interviews, using a structured survey with a Likert scale and open-ended questions administered to users of betting platforms. The results show a high frequency of exposure to sports betting advertisements, a growing interest driven by promotions, and a widespread perception of betting as an acceptable form of entertainment, even though many users acknowledge the risks. It is concluded that advertising has a significant impact on the decision to bet, especially when it presents betting as safe and lucrative. It is recommended that clear regulatory frameworks, awareness campaigns,

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and critical digital literacy initiatives be implemented to mitigate the impact of advertising on vulnerable audiences.

Keywords: digital advertising; sports betting; youth behavior; social media.

RESUMEN

La publicidad de casas de apuestas deportivas en plataformas digitales ha experimentado un crecimiento exponencial en los últimos años, captando la atención especialmente de los jóvenes a través de redes sociales como X (antes Twitter), TikTok y YouTube. Esta Investigación tuvo como objetivo general analizar la influencia de la publicidad digital de apuestas deportivas en el comportamiento de consumo de usuarios jóvenes en Ecuador, particularmente en su exposición y toma de decisiones frente a estas plataformas. El estudio se desarrolló bajo un enfoque metodológico cuantitativo y complementado con entrevistas cualitativas, mediante la aplicación de una encuesta estructurada con escala de Likert y entrevistas abiertas a usuarios de plataformas de apuestas. Los resultados evidencian una alta frecuencia de exposición a publicidad de apuestas, un creciente interés motivado por promociones y una percepción generalizada de las apuestas como una forma aceptable de entretenimiento, a pesar de que muchos usuarios reconocen los riesgos. Se concluye que la publicidad incide significativamente en la decisión de apostar, especialmente cuando presenta los juegos como seguros y lucrativos. Se recomienda implementar marcos normativos claros, campañas de concienciación y alfabetización digital crítica para mitigar el impacto publicitario en los públicos vulnerables.

Palabras clave: publicidad digital; apuestas deportivas; comportamiento juvenil; redes sociales.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies has reshaped spaces for social and commercial interaction, giving rise to new dynamics in the promotion of products and services, particularly through social media. Within this context, sports betting companies have deployed aggressive, visually appealing, and highly targeted marketing strategies aimed primarily at young audiences. This new form of advertising has raised growing

concerns about its influence on consumption patterns, especially regarding the normalization of gambling as a recreational activity.

This study focuses on analyzing the influence of social media advertising by sports betting companies on consumer behavior—a relationship that raises multiple social, economic, and psychological implications. The problem statement is grounded in the need to understand how these messages impact decision-making, particularly among active users of digital platforms. To this end, two fundamental variables were addressed: social media advertising, understood as a digital commercial communication strategy, and consumer behavior, approached from its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

Regarding the objectives, the general purpose was defined as determining the influence of digital advertising by sports betting companies on consumers' decisions and attitudes. Additionally, specific objectives were established related to the theoretical, methodological, empirical, and propositional analysis of the phenomenon under study. The research is justified both by its social relevance and by the lack of recent local studies that systematically address this interaction. Finally, the scope of the study focused on a specific group of active social media users within a defined period, drawing on complementary disciplines such as consumer psychology, digital communication, and commercial law.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has structurally reshaped traditional communication mechanisms, positioning social media as key platforms in contemporary marketing strategies. This phenomenon has been particularly exploited by sports betting companies, which have directed substantial investments toward developing targeted, persuasive, and high-frequency digital advertising campaigns.

This study aims to analyze the influence of social media advertising by sports betting companies on consumer behavior, considering digital advertising elements and users' behavioral responses as the main variables. Throughout the study, the emerging issue arising from constant exposure to promotional content that uses emotional stimuli, promises of financial success, and playful elements to capture the public's attention was addressed (Killick & Griffiths, 2021). Such repeated exposure can lead to changes in consumption patterns, promoting impulsive decisions or even problematic behaviors such as compulsive gambling (Gómez et al., 2020).

The general objective of the research is to determine how digital advertising influences consumer behavior, while the specific objectives address the theoretical framework of the problem, its methodological approach, the empirical findings, and a proposal aimed at mitigating associated risks.

The rapid advancement of digital platforms has triggered a structural transformation in marketing strategies, particularly in the field of digital marketing, where social media has become a high-impact channel for reaching audiences by enabling precise segmentation and direct interaction with users (Muñoz, 2024). In this context, sports betting companies have capitalized on the opportunities offered by the digital ecosystem through hyper-specialized, attractive, and emotionally evocative advertising campaigns,

disseminated on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) (Cárdenas, 2024) . These virtual spaces allow for constant contact with consumers, creating an omnipresent advertising environment. Constant exposure to this type of content has raised growing concerns regarding its effects on risk perception, decision-making, and consumer behavior, particularly among young people, who are highly vulnerable to persuasive stimuli of a recreational and financial nature (E. Killick & Griffiths, 2021) .

From a communication perspective, social media advertising is characterized by its interactive, personalized, and highly persuasive nature. Far from being limited to simply informing, this type of advertising employs strategies based on neuromarketing, emotional design, retargeting, and behavioral reinforcement techniques to influence consumer behavior (Alami, 2024) . In the sports betting sector, advertising messages are designed to generate engagement through the promise of immediate rewards, the illusion of control, and the emulation of desirable lifestyles, often portrayed by influencers or celebrities. These campaigns seek not only to attract users but also to build loyalty through repetitive stimuli and intermittent reinforcement, characteristic of the behaviorist model (Bernaola et al., 2024) . This phenomenon raises serious questions about its role in the progressive normalization of risky behaviors, such as problem gambling, loss of control, or overestimation of the odds of success.

Consumer behavior—understood as the set of mental, emotional, and behavioral processes that determine purchasing decisions—constitutes the central dependent variable of this study (Miura & Reyes, 2021) . Individuals' responses to advertising stimuli are influenced by cognitive, affective, social, and cultural factors, all of which are amplified in highly stimulating digital environments.

In the case of sports betting advertising, an increase in the willingness to participate in gambling, changes in digital consumption habits, and greater tolerance for financial risk have been documented, especially following continuous exposure to attractive and emotionally charged advertising stimuli (Contardo, 2024a) . These findings suggest a significant relationship between the frequency and design of digital advertising and the adoption of gambling behaviors, which is particularly concerning in contexts where the regulatory framework is weak or financial education is lacking.

In this context, sports betting companies emerge as a crucial intervening variable, given that they design and implement persuasive content, with full control over the message, the platform, audience segmentation, and the intensity of exposure (Laurel, 2024) .

These companies not only optimize their campaigns through big data analysis and machine learning algorithms but also manipulate psychological elements such as loss aversion, the dopamine loop, and FOMO (fear of missing out), integrating them into their visual and discursive narratives. This ability to shape the user experience through persuasive and highly targeted strategies increases their influence on consumer decision-making processes (E. Killick & Griffiths, 2021) . Consequently, analyzing their role in

digital advertising dynamics cannot be secondary but must be central to understanding how consumer behavior is shaped in contexts of high exposure to online gambling.

Commercial promotion through social media has established itself as one of the most decisive tools in shaping contemporary consumer decisions. This phenomenon is particularly evident in sectors such as online sports betting, where advertising strategies are carefully designed to capture users' attention in a matter of seconds and encourage immediate responses (Miranda, 2024) . In this context, it becomes essential to analyze how this type of communication influences consumer behavior, particularly given the sustained increase in the use of digital platforms and the growth in investment in targeted campaigns by sportsbooks (Salom, 2024) . This study is significant because it addresses an emerging and complex issue that involves not only marketing aspects but also social, economic, and psychological implications, affecting vulnerable groups such as young people with greater intensity.

From an applied perspective, this research is significant because it focuses on the interaction between two key variables: digital advertising and consumer behavior, within the context of a specific population of active social media users exposed to content related to sports betting (Vallejo, 2024) . Studying this relationship allows us to identify advertising-induced behavioral patterns and provide empirical evidence on their effects on consumer decision-making processes. Furthermore, the findings derived from this analysis could have practical value for various sectors—such as educational organizations, regulatory institutions, consumer behavior specialists, and marketing professionals—interested in understanding the psychosocial consequences of the intensive use of advertising strategies in digital environments.

This research will be conducted in an urban setting, specifically in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, where there is high penetration of social media use and sustained growth in the promotion of sports betting platforms. The study population consists of active social media users between the ages of 18 and 35, an age group that exhibits a high level of interaction with digital content related to sports betting.

The study's time frame covers the period from January 2023 to December 2024, during which advertising campaigns disseminated on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X will be analyzed, along with the behaviors associated with their reception by the target audience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve a deeper and more multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon under investigation: the influence of sports betting advertising on consumer behavior. On the one hand, the quantitative approach allows for the collection of statistically representative data through structured surveys, facilitating the measurement of the frequency of advertising exposure, the characteristics of visual content, and users' behavioral responses.

On the other hand, the qualitative approach, implemented through open-ended interviews, complements this analysis by exploring in greater depth the perceptions, beliefs, and motivations underlying the decisions of consumers exposed to this type of advertising. The combination of both approaches not only ensures data triangulation and greater validity of the results but also allows for addressing the study's specific objectives from a comprehensive perspective, capturing both the observable patterns and the subjective meanings of user behavior.

This project is classified as prospective, field-based, and bibliographic research. It is prospective in that it formulates a proposal based on the results obtained but does not contemplate their immediate practical application. It is also field-based research, since primary data will be collected directly from the unit of observation (active social media users exposed to sports betting advertisements). Finally, it is a bibliographic study, as it is based on the review and analysis of theoretical sources and recent literature, which enabled the construction of the theoretical and contextual framework.

The method adopted in this research will be empiricism, since knowledge is constructed based on the researcher's direct observation and sensory experience with the collected data. This approach views reality as an observable and measurable phenomenon, allowing for the identification of trends in consumer behavior based on their interaction with advertising content on social media.

Likewise, elements of constructivism will be integrated, given that both the researcher and the study participants mutually influence the process of knowledge construction (Zou & Yu, 2022). As this study examines perceptions, habits, and behaviors in response to digital stimuli, constructivism allows us to understand how users' experiences on social media shape their consumption decisions.

The study population consisted of young adults aged 18 to 29 residing in Ecuador who were active social media users and had been exposed to advertising content from sports betting companies during the previous quarter. However, due to the lack of official statistics determining the exact number of people with these characteristics—since neither the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses nor other government entities report this data with precision—it was assumed that the population was infinite or indeterminate.

Given this situation, the probabilistic sample was calculated using the statistical formula for an infinite population, with a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), a margin of error of 5% ($e = 0.05$), and an expected proportion of 50% ($p = 0.5$)—a standard value used when the behavior of the population is unknown.

Formula for calculating an infinite sample:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

Z = Z-value (1.96 for a 95% confidence level)

p = Probability of success (0.5)

q = 1 - p (0.5)

e = Maximum allowable error (0.05)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{(1,96)^2 \cdot 0,5 \cdot 0,5}{(0,05)^2} = \frac{3,8416 \cdot 0,25}{0,0025} = \frac{0,9604}{0,0025} = 384,16$$

$$n \approx 384$$

Based on this calculation, it was determined that the minimum valid sample size for the study was 384 people. However, considering limitations in access and resources, a sample of at least 100 participants was established as the minimum viable criterion (here, the research was validated with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.893), which allowed for sufficient frequency analyses and internal validations for the proposed exploratory-descriptive design. The sample was intentionally distributed using quota sampling, applying the following criteria: being an urban resident, being between 18 and 29 years old, being exposed to gambling advertisements on social media, and having participated in online gambling at least once.

Data collection took place over a three-week period via digital platforms and with the participants' informed consent, ensuring the confidentiality and voluntary nature of the process, in accordance with the bioethical principles established by the University and by the Social Research Ethics Committee (CEIS, 2022).

RESULTS

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, based on the application of two main techniques: a structured survey with closed-ended items using a Likert scale (quantitative) and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (qualitative). This combination made it possible to explore both the frequency and patterns of exposure to sports betting advertising on social media, as well as users' subjective perceptions and decision-making processes. Since the study did not include direct observation, the analysis focused exclusively on the data collected through these instruments.

The quantitative results are presented using frequency tables, percentages, and bar charts, while the qualitative data were thematically categorized to identify discursive patterns and connections with the theoretical dimensions established in the operationalization matrix. This analysis is structured by variable, dimension, and indicator, in line with the specific objectives and ensuring a rigorous and consistent treatment of the information gathered.

Analysis of the data collected via the questionnaire shows that 35.9% of respondents reported being frequently exposed to advertising content related to sports betting on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok. This figure represents the largest group among the participants, followed by 27.3% who indicated they rarely encounter this type of advertisement, and 17.7% who do so sometimes. It is worth noting that only 8.3% reported never having been exposed to such content, while 10.7% indicated they are always exposed to it.

These results suggest that most users are regularly exposed to sports betting advertisements on social media, reinforcing the notion that these platforms have become a primary promotional channel for these companies. The prevalence of this exposure at the “frequently” and “always” levels indicates that digital targeting algorithms work effectively to direct these messages toward previously identified audiences, typically young people and active digital consumers.

The results show that social media platform X (formerly Twitter) was identified by 38.8% of respondents as the channel where they have most frequently seen sports betting-related advertising. It is followed by YouTube, at 27.6%, and TikTok, at 16.7%, while Instagram and Facebook recorded significantly lower percentages: 9.6% and 7.3%, respectively.

This result is particularly revealing when considering the demographic profile of X and YouTube users, who—according to recent studies on digital consumption in Latin America (Herrera & Cabrera, 2023; Paredes, 2022)—largely consist of young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, the same segment identified as the target audience by sports betting companies. These platforms offer dynamic visual formats and short-form content, which facilitate an impactful experience with strong emotional retention—ideal for persuasive campaigns.

In conclusion, this finding establishes that platforms with fast-paced visual formats and high traffic during sporting events are the most effective for disseminating gambling advertisements, which represents a critical factor in shaping attitudes favorable to gambling, especially when exposure occurs without ethical filters or regulatory controls. Thus, this indicator supports the need for policy and educational interventions to mitigate the influence of these digital environments on at-risk populations.

The results indicate that a large majority of respondents perceive a significant increase in the amount of betting advertising over the past year. 42.4% describe it as a slight increase, while 37.8% perceive it as high and 13% as very high. Only 2.6% describe it as a moderate increase, and a small 4.2% consider it to have been very low.

This pattern suggests a marked collective perception of growing advertising exposure, with a total of 50.8% falling into the “high” and “very high” categories, implying that one in two users feels that the frequency of these messages has increased significantly. This phenomenon may be linked to the boom in online gambling, especially following the easing of technological barriers, the live streaming of sporting events, and the

incorporation of digital influencers as promoters for betting companies, as documented in studies such as that by Jaramillo & Torres (2023).

In summary, analysis of this indicator suggests that the growth of gambling advertising is not only quantifiable at the commercial level but also perceptible to the average user, reinforcing the need to consider ethical regulation and social responsibility criteria in marketing campaigns. Furthermore, it validates the importance of this study by providing empirical evidence of the shift in betting companies' communication practices and its impact on the daily lives of social media users.

The data reveal that 72.6% of respondents report seeing content sponsored by betting companies frequently or occasionally. Specifically, 45.6% do so frequently, 10.7% see it sometimes, and 6.3% are always exposed to this type of advertising. Only 29.9% say they rarely notice it, while a mere 7.6% claim never to have seen it.

This behavior is a direct reflection of the intensive marketing strategies adopted by sports betting companies, which have found social media to be a prime channel for spreading their messages. These campaigns use formats such as banners, short videos, stories featuring exclusive promotions, and, above all, sponsored content featuring public figures, athletes, or influencers, which increases their visibility and emotional impact.

In conclusion, this indicator shows that sponsored content from sportsbooks is firmly embedded in the average user's media diet, making this exposure a structural component of their daily digital experience.

It is noted that 54.2% of respondents (37.5% agree and 16.7% strongly agree) believe that betting companies' advertising messages are appealing to young audiences. On the other hand, 41.9% (37% disagree and 4.9% strongly disagree) perceive that these messages do not strongly appeal to that age group, while only 3.9% remain neutral.

This result points to a polarization in perceptions, though with a clear tendency to acknowledge the appeal these advertising strategies hold for young people. Advertising by sportsbooks is not limited to showcasing promotions or bonuses; it also incorporates elements of gamification, eye-catching graphic design, informal language, viral challenges, and collaborations with influencers or streamers—tools that have already been identified by various studies. A large majority of respondents reported that advertising promotions strongly influence their interest in participating in sports betting. Specifically, 51.8% noted that these promotions “greatly” influence their interest, and an additional 10.4% indicated that they influence it “ly” or “too much.” This represents a total of 62.2% of participants who acknowledge a significant effect of promotional strategies on their behavior.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, 6.3% indicated that promotions have “no” influence and 29.9% said they have “little” influence, while only 1.6% considered their influence to be “moderate.” This pattern reveals a predominance of positive perceptions or high influence regarding promotions, suggesting the effectiveness of these strategies as mechanisms of persuasion to trigger betting decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

The research confirmed that sports betting advertising has a direct and significant influence on users' online betting behavior, especially among younger audiences. High exposure to advertising messages on social media, the frequent appearance of sponsored content, and attractive promotions generate a progressive motivation to participate in betting, thereby altering users' attitudes, perceptions, and decisions. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is validated: the greater the exposure to sports betting advertising, the greater the propensity to engage in active betting behavior on these platforms.

Regarding the level of exposure to sports betting advertising

Most respondents reported being frequently or constantly exposed to sports betting advertising on platforms such as TikTok, X, and YouTube. This level of exposure points to a well-targeted and highly persistent marketing strategy that employs short, visually appealing content linked to public figures or digital influencers. This type of advertising has established itself as a tool for normalizing gambling in digital environments, as noted by Huertas Bailén (2010) and Bernal Triviño and Chaparro-Domínguez (2021).

On the Perception of Advertising Content

The results show that, although there is a group that is critical of advertising messages, a large portion of the participants perceive gambling as a potentially profitable, safe, and entertaining activity. The interviews reinforced the idea that the messages downplay risk, present gambling as a positive experience, and even reinforce the idea of success or status. These strategies align with the findings of authors such as Griffiths (2003) and Castelló and Montagut (2022), who warn about the persuasive and emotional nature of these advertising discourses.

On the Influence of Advertising on Motivation and the Decision to Gamble

A significant portion of respondents reported having made the decision to gamble after being exposed to advertising campaigns. This direct relationship between advertising stimuli and behavior was also evident in the interviews, where it was acknowledged that advertising acts as an emotional and behavioral trigger, especially when linked to promotions, bonuses, or messages of immediacy. The study confirms that advertising acts as a motivational mechanism, in line with the findings of Kahneman and Tversky (1979) in their theory of decision-making under uncertainty.

On the Evolution of Advertising-Influenced Consumer Behavior

Both quantitative and qualitative data reveal that users' betting behavior evolves as a result of their exposure to advertising. Initially, they place basic or sporadic bets, but gradually, prompted by promotional content, they adopt more frequent or complex betting patterns. This shift in consumption patterns is a direct result of campaigns aimed at building user loyalty through targeted offers and personalized content, which validates Bandura's (1986) social learning theory.

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