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# THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING

## RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING REQUIRES RESPONSIVE REGULATION

ADRIAN SLADDIN, KIRSTIE HEPBURN,  
PROFESSOR PAUL DOLAN SEPTEMBER 2025



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# Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the current regulatory landscape for the [£1.5 billion gambling advertising sector](#) in the UK. The paper covers the role of social media, influencers, and associated promotions across gambling and gaming products. Regulation across this broad sector varies considerably from gaming to gambling, and across UK and international jurisdictions. This leads to an increasingly complex and hard-to-police legislative environment, especially in the presence of emerging technologies and markets. The growing grey and black markets provide their own challenges, since they operate outside traditional legal frameworks.

There have been major advances in technology that have changed the way that people gamble, most notably developments in smartphones, betting apps, and the rise of online gambling sites devoted to casino games and sportsbooks. This has been accompanied by the emergence of new gambling companies, esports and casinos. The rise of crypto currencies and blockchain offer anonymity, opportunities for money laundering and decentralising of operations.

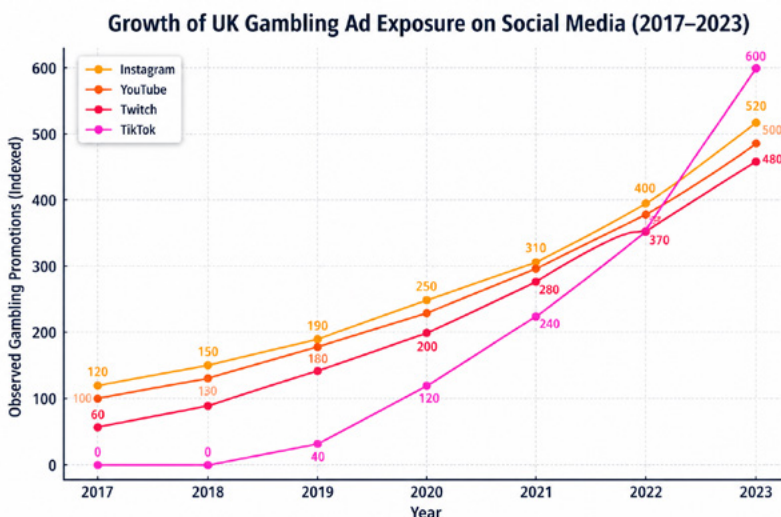
The Gambling Act of 2005 removed advertising prohibitions previously in place for many gambling products, allowing operators to advertise on television and radio for the first time. This increased the risk of advertising to young and vulnerable consumers. The regulatory framework created by the Gambling Commission, working with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), implemented a range of measures designed to protect these groups from being harmed or exploited by gambling content. [The guidance](#) requires that adverts must be truthful, discourage excessive gambling, and must not target minors or vulnerable individuals.

## Regulation in the digital age

The [gambling digital marketing](#) landscape is far from straightforward. The industry is heavily regulated in some jurisdictions, and marketers must walk a fine line between innovation and compliance. The Gambling Act in the UK has not been updated since 2005 and does not take into account newer forms of gambling, including gaming and esports, or the increase in the grey and black markets. Any guidance or code of conduct for this sector needs to be flexible enough to work with technological advances, such as in AI, VR, and cryptocurrencies, but robust enough to facilitate enforcement across borders.

As shown in figure 1, there was significant growth in gambling advertising exposure across the four major social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X and TikTok) up to 2023 (*Fig.1*). TikTok ad revenue has increased steadily in recent years and is [estimated to reach \\$33.12 billion](#) in 2025, an increase of 40.4% compared to the previous year. By year end, TikTok is [predicted to have](#) 955.3 million users.

Figure 1:



The rise of AI, social media, cryptocurrencies and blockchain all offer new routes to market and new opportunities. They also come with new threats to current regulation and new gaps in its efficacy. The regulatory frameworks are too loosely regulated to apply to cross-border platforms such as TikTok livestreams, YouTube vlogs, Instagram stories, Kick Livestream or Discord sponsorships. The existing regulatory mechanisms are not equipped to police border-blurring online activities of operators and influencers; assigning responsibility and therefore jurisdiction is difficult. Updated clauses tailored to the nuances posed by online content are required.

Implicit in the growth of social media marketing, and the rise in online betting platforms, is its increased availability to young people. Regardless of the myriad problems with the [UK Online Safety Act](#), passed in July 2025, it highlights the need to protect young people in particular from harmful or fraudulent content in online advertising and social media. Regulators Ofcom will monitor and enforce compliance, with the advertising and marketing sector [expected to adopt better policies accordingly](#). The key challenge here will be to avoid the unintended consequences of well-intentioned legislation e.g., the use of VPNs to circumvent the law.

In the UK, gambling advertising must comply with chapter 17 of [BCAP's UK Code of Broadcast Advertising](#) and chapter 16 of [CAP's UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing](#). These two codes – from Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) – cover the breadth of advertising outlets. [The guiding principle](#) is to ensure that gambling advertisements do not portray, condone or encourage gambling behaviour that is socially irresponsible or could lead to financial, social or emotional harm or suggest that gambling can be a solution to financial concerns.

Specific guidance is given on not featuring players who are (or may be) under 25 or have an association with youth culture or activities. This covers the use of content that is specifically geared towards younger audiences, and content should not link gambling with success (financial or personal). Consequences are clearly laid out and cover the mandatory withdrawal of adverts, or referral to Ofcom or the Gambling Commission. The growth of online gambling and gaming and social media platforms, and [their appeal to younger audiences](#), means the need to update protection for under-18s is pressing.

CAP provided enhanced guidance on esports prompted by [research by the University of Bristol and Demos](#) which identified a significant increase in both the playing of esports and associated activity. CAP gave assurances that there were no gaps in consumer protection. Their response also stated, however, that the majority of eSports betting marketing is published by or on behalf of overseas' operators, which are not licensed by the Gambling Commission. CAP placed responsibility with UK-licensed gambling operators to ensure their advertising complied with UK legislation, and to the Gambling Commission to act in the case of unlicensed operators targeted British consumers.

The UK's Gambling Commission is an executive, non-departmental public body of the government responsible for regulating gambling and supervising gaming law in Great Britain. It also offers gambling licence information, guidance and advice for businesses and individuals. Listed within its responsibilities is protecting children and vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited. These guidelines are administered by the Industry Group for Responsible Gambling (IGRG) which in turn is coordinated by the Betting & Gaming Council (BGC).

The BGC lists a range of voluntary measures around advertising. The guidance covers a range of gambling, and the BGC handbook refers specifically to social media marketing ([paragraphs 52 to 55](#)), placing equal responsibility on both platform providers and gambling operators in the first instance, outlining appropriate age restrictions and safer gambling messages. But there is no explicit reference to social media platforms and influencers. The seventh iteration of the BGC code makes it clear that third party advertising must be aimed at customers over 25 where such an age filter exists. Therein lies the challenge – age filters rely on transparent and accurate recording of age, and responsible use of the data.

## International models

The **European Union**, through the European Betting & Gaming Association (EGBA), published the first pan-European code of conduct of its kind published guidance in its [Code of Conduct on Responsible Advertising for Online Gambling](#). The code of conduct drew on previous codes from Denmark and Sweden as well as some content direct from the European Community. Much of the content is like the UK, including the need for balanced content, not targeting under 18s, and providing safer play messaging. While the code is for advice and guidance, its content and regulatory aims are endorsed by all members, which include global companies like Bettson, Bet365, William Hill, Kindred and GVC Holdings, and companies from Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Belgium and Denmark.

Section 8 of the code directly addresses issues around social media and influencers, stating: “**Gambling operators** should ensure, where possible, that paid marketing is clearly labelled when produced in collaboration with influencers, bloggers and when purchasing editorial content. For example, the hashtag #ad ... can be used to indicate sponsored content on social media, which is either uploaded by the **Gambling operator** or by the sponsored party (influencer, ambassadors, bloggers, etc).” By referencing bloggers, editorial content and influencers together the code is more wide-ranging than the UK’s version.

**Poland** has strict restrictions over online gambling, which is subject to a state monopoly under the Gambling Act. Its definition of gambling promotion is wide, and sites deemed to be in breach are blocked immediately. Reference is also made to the banning of gambling advertising which is considered intrusive in the private or public arena; however, no specific reference is made to social media and promotion or the use of influencers.

In **Germany**, the German Advertising Federation acknowledges that appropriate advertising of legal gambling is “indispensable in order to channel participants to a protected and safe market.” This recognises that increasing regulation and suppressing advertising from legal operators may push customers towards grey and black market operators, acknowledging that interventions can have unintended consequences.

**Spain** has seen a fall and rise in gambling advertising since COVID-19. The lack of live sports during this time, alongside a strengthened regulatory framework saw a cessation in sponsorship of sports teams and the disappearance of much television advertising for lotteries, betting shops and online casinos. Post-pandemic, the supreme court ruled in 2024 that the [new restrictions were unlawful](#) and, other than the protection of minors and vulnerable groups in society, the most stringent restrictions could be lifted. Again, there is currently no guidance on social media platforms and content creators with regard to online gambling advertising.

Gambling in **France** is regulated by the Autorité Nationale des Jeux (ANJ), which announced [new regulations and recommendations](#) in 2022. These included prohibiting the use of role models such as athletes in advertising, direct targeting of minors. Specifically, the ANJ bans online gambling advertising if 13–17-year olds make up 16 per cent of an influencer’s or blogger’s audience on social media.

**The Netherlands** has seen significant clampdowns on operators in the last five years. In 2023, the Netherlands Gambling Authority (Kansspelautoriteit, KSA) announced [certain new restrictions on gambling advertising](#) with a grace period of two years to allow operators to adjust their business practices. Most significant was the change in sports sponsorship in 2025. Operators are “no longer allowed to place gambling branding in any public form. This also applies to sports partnerships, which were previously the same exception.” There is currently no focus on social media platforms carrying gambling advertising through the use of influencers and bloggers.

Under the Sports Minister Andrea Abodi, **Italy** has seen significant changes with regard to gambling sponsorship, including imposing a 1% levy on all income generated from this source. That levy will be used to fund a range of good causes such as stadium infrastructure, player protection initiatives and investment in women’s and community sport. There are also plans are to lessen restrictions on television and online gambling advertising with further reform expected by the end of 2025.

In the last two years, the **Norwegian Gambling Authority** (Lotteritilsynet) issued cease and desist orders to some TikTok and Instagram influencers for advertising betting services. The orders carried severe penalties, and threatened fines of up to 1 million krona to any influencer or advertiser who did not remove the unlawful advertisements in time. In December 2024, the Court of Appeal reaffirmed the ability of the regulator to impose sanctions. As a result of the ruling, the regulator noted a 35 per cent reduction in the impressions of unlicensed gambling content on Norwegian social media feeds.

In **Brazil** the Senate [recently passed a law](#) on gambling-related advertising, particularly in connection with fixed-odds betting. This will face heavy restrictions including an embargo on any direct advertisements, as well as the use of celebrities, influencer and bloggers. Inappropriate content and misleading claims also feature along with sponsorship of other products. Advertising during a match is also prohibited along with printed advertising in papers and magazines.

## What about the platforms?

The ASA has clear guidelines for influencers and bloggers in '[An Influencer's Guide to making clear that ads are ads](#)'. This includes affiliate marketing as well as advertorial content and considers paid-for space (banner ads, promoted or sponsored content) and own advertising (where an individual promotes their own product or prize which could be related to gambling). Benefits should be declared, whether financial or in kind, and this could also include free gifts such as holidays, products and other benefits. All these elements need to be clearly articulated.

There is no specific reference to gambling advertising in the guide, despite it being recognised as a fast-emerging market by the ASA. According to a report by the University of Bristol on [social media gambling advertising in the United States](#), there is gambling ad on social media every six seconds. As the report notes "The high volume of ads raises concerns, as excessive exposure may be linked to increased gambling participation and harmful behaviours." If this growth is mirrored in the UK, then there is a need for greater regulation in this area, given that only one in four of the organic advertisements in the US adhered to their code.

Social media platforms had initially been reluctant to accept responsibility for the actions and content of their users; however, recent events displaying the harm caused young and vulnerable users have prompted a [growing call for this to change](#). The claim that these are merely platforms and not publishers of content has led to increased discussion of levels of accountability and responsibility by these sites.

TikTok lists a number of [rules and regulations](#) on their platform, explaining that they "prioritise audience safety by regulating gambling and related activities." Written permission from the platform is required before online gambling and gaming ads will be permitted, and must be accompanied by proof of the appropriate licences. Specific mention is given preventing ads that appeal – or are delivered to – young people. How well the platform can enforce these restrictions across international jurisdictions is unclear.

YouTube has recently [updated its advice](#) on gambling advertising and the Gambling Commission carries explicit advice on how to opt out of this. The platform claims it has strengthened its approach to unrealistic claims on winning and on links to illegal sites, as well as through age restrictions YouTube will not carry URL links to black market gambling operators; sports betting and in-person gambling videos will still be allowed.

In July 2025 Meta announced a [raft of new measures](#) in connection with online gambling advertising, stating "advertisers can now promote social casinos and free-to-play (F2P) games without needing prior authorisation." Meta's framework dictates that anyone advertising gambling on its channels must register as an affiliate in order to use their sites. This will require several checks around identification, age verification and business name, which need to be ratified by Meta's own verification portal.

[Twitch has clear policies](#) on what is branded and non-branded content in the first instance, and does not permit advertising for "risky gambling products such as promoting online slots or roulette websites." In 2022 Twitch published extensive guidance on the subject including Dice Gambling sites. Prohibited sites included some well-known brands including Stake.com, Rollbit.com, Duelbits.com, and Roobet.com. Their regulations went further than some other platform providers as they also prohibit free social versions, and any chat references to the sites in question was also banned.

## Conclusion

The UK's regulatory landscape for gambling advertising faces significant structural challenges when confronted with the pace of technological innovation and the increasingly borderless nature of digital gambling. The current framework, which relies primarily on the Gambling Commission's licensing requirements for operators targeting British consumers, struggles to address the reality that [offshore operators can easily circumvent these rules](#) through sophisticated digital marketing tactics and payment workarounds.

While direct cryptocurrency deposits to UK gambling sites are banned, regulatory loopholes remain through permitted payment services, and unlicensed offshore operators offering crypto payments have seen UK traffic surge by over 500% between 2021 and 2024, attracting [over 1.3 million UK visits monthly](#). The traditional licensing model becomes ineffective when international operators can target UK consumers through social media, influencer marketing, and emerging platforms without establishing a meaningful UK presence.

Furthermore, the regulatory apparatus lacks the agility needed to address rapidly evolving technologies such as blockchain-based gambling, NFT gaming, and decentralised finance gambling platforms that blur traditional boundaries. The decentralised nature of cryptocurrencies makes it difficult to track transactions and enforce regulations, while cryptocurrency volatility [creates additional financial risks](#) that existing advertising standards cannot adequately address.

Recent attempts to close regulatory loopholes, such as the ASA's amendments to apply advertising rules to non-UK operators, represent reactive rather than proactive regulatory approaches. It is incumbent on all well-intentioned actors in the gambling market to collaborate in ways that allow them to get ahead of the curve insofar as that is possible in a fast-changing world. Clearly articulating the objectives and priorities of regulation is an obvious but overlooked place to start.

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**COMMUNITY CARE  
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Community Care Gaming, 124 City Road, London, EC1V 2NX  
E: [hello@communitycaregaming.org](mailto:hello@communitycaregaming.org) | T: 0203 488 5227 | [www.communitycaregaming.org](http://www.communitycaregaming.org)

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