

Consideration of the impact of immediate calls to action within gambling advertising

Sally Gainsbury & Alex Blaszczynski

Summary

- Calls to action (e.g., “Bet Now!”) can be effective and persuasive in influencing behaviours and decisions to act as they use simple, clear language, are positively framed, and convey a sense of urgency.
- Gambling advertisements that contain calls to action are most likely to influence existing gamblers, and particularly customers of a gambling operator as these consumers are likely to consider these advertisements as directly relevant and to resonate with their personal interests/motivations to gamble.
- Calls to action that can be acted on immediately and easily, such as through mobile apps or websites, are more likely to result in behavioural action.
- Calls to action related to placing bets are likely to have the greatest impact on those who have difficulty controlling their gambling.

There is limited empirical evidence regarding the impact of gambling advertising. Research suggests that for the majority of consumers, gambling advertising has a limited impact, although those vulnerable to experiencing or developing gambling problems are more likely to be effected by these¹. In particular, advertisements for online gambling have been reported to be highly influential on individuals identified as having gambling-related problems². Individuals report that due to the easy, immediate, and constant access to online gambling, advertisements for these products often prompt immediate expenditure with little consideration of previously set limits.

Gambling advertisements are highly regulated, despite limited research on the impact of various content. The intent of advertising codes and regulations are to avoid inducements that would be specifically impactful for individuals who have difficulty controlling their gambling and making rational decisions about gambling expenditure. These vulnerable populations include children and youth, who lack the cognitive maturity to appropriately evaluate risky behaviours, and individuals at-risk of or experiencing gambling-related problems, including gambling disorder.

The purpose of any inducement is to change behavior through changing people’s judgments and actions³. There are numerous marketing components that incorporate persuasive communication modes, which stimulate consumer wants through advertising and other forms of communication. These include indirect advertisements aimed at influencing brand awareness and sentiment, and direct advertisements, including calls to action⁴. Calls to action are typified by including direct, immediate language and comments, often conveying a sense of urgency, for example, “Bet Now!”. It can be argued that the concept of cognitive regret, that is, distress and disappointment in missing an opportunity to win, plays a relevant role in individuals responding to calls for immediate action. Such

¹ Binde, “Gambling Advertising.”

² Hing et al., “Do Advertising and Promotions for Online Gambling Increase Gambling Consumption?”

³ Emanuel, Currie, and Herman, “Undue Inducement in Clinical Research in Developing Countries.”

⁴ Beem and Shaffer, “Triggers to Customer Action-Some Elements in a Theory of Promotional Inducement.”

tactics are exemplified by sales techniques urging consumers to purchase now and take advantage of a 'deal' before an imminent increase in price occurs.

Calls to action typically use very simple and clear language, which enhance communication effectiveness as well as positive framing and a sense of urgency, which are strong motivators for action⁵. According to the dual theory of processing, if they are perceived to be relevant, calls to action may be processed peripherally, with less critical examination and consideration of the message⁶. Consumers may not be willing or have the ability to process marketing messages and their implications extensively. In such cases, powerful and persuasive language regarding products already viewed favourably, with actions that are consistent with previous behaviour may lead to less critical consideration.

Calls to action often relate to easy to perform behaviours, and often are accompanied by additional information to enable consumers to carry out the urged task, for example, details of or link to a website or phone number. People are more likely to change their behaviour if they believe that they can succeed, that is, if they have a high level of self-efficacy, or perceived behavioural control⁷. Advertisements can be made more effective if they reinforce people's beliefs that they are capable of achieving a specific action⁸. One way to increase perceived self-efficacy is for advertisements to clearly state what action is required to achieve the end goal. Making marketing messages specific also increases their effectiveness in terms of user engagement. Research on health behaviours has found that clearly specifying the steps to take increases the effectiveness of these messages⁹. Therefore, calls to action that provide specific information about the process of the behaviour, may increase the likelihood of consumers engaging in the prompted behaviour.

With regards to gambling advertising specifically, the immediacy with which a behaviour prompted by a call to action can be conducted is proportional to the potential for harm. Individuals with gambling-related problems are more likely to have difficulties controlling their impulses, gamble more than they intended, and beyond affordable levels of gambling expenditure¹⁰. Gambling is highly accessible, including conveniently located retail outlets in addition to websites and mobile apps. Subsequently, calls to bet within gambling advertisements can theoretically be acted on almost immediately, particularly by customers who already have an account with the specific operator. As such, these types of marketing are most likely to influence existing customers of an online operator. New customers of an online operator would be required to go through a series of steps to open an account. For retail venues, customers are required to locate and enter the venue, unless the promotion is within a licensed venue. Most online operators make the process of account opening quick and easy, such that this does not create a hurdle that would prevent a consumer from acting on their original intention of placing a bet immediately. Increasing the time required to open an account and processes required would allow consumers a type of 'cooling-off' period to process their actions and have a more considered decision regarding their intended betting behaviour.

⁵ Yank et al., "Learning from Marketing."

⁶ Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, "Consumers' Processing of Persuasive Advertisements."

⁷ Strahan et al., "Enhancing the Effectiveness of Tobacco Package Warning Labels."

⁸ Bandura, "Self-Efficacy."

⁹ Wright, "Concrete Action Plans in TV Messages to Increase Reading of Drug Warnings"; Vallone et al., "Evaluation of EX."

¹⁰ Blaszczynski et al., "Responsible Gambling."

However, any requirements on account-opening procedures need to be balanced against the increased burden on operators and consumers, to the extent that consumers may prefer to open accounts with offshore operators.

There is little empirical evidence regarding the impact of calls to action within marketing messages. In a survey of mobile advertising industry professionals (n=45), 48% reported that including a 'call to action' with an immediate response possible was critical for the marketing to succeed¹¹. One study found that consumers who see SMS marketing with calls to action to be personally relevant are significantly more likely to take action than those who see no relevance in the campaigns¹². Calls to action may direct consumers to make a purchase (place a bet), or include other behaviours such as visiting a website, entering a competition, sharing contact details, sending a SMS, downloading an app, opening an account, or taking up a promotional offer. The impact of non-betting calls to action may extend beyond the immediate behaviour. The theory of cognitive dissonance holds that once a consumer has taken an action towards a company, even if this is a non-betting action, they are more likely to think positively about the company, and by association, its products¹³. This is supported by research as consumers who act in response to SMS calls to actions are much more likely to have positive views of the brand and purchase intention, even if the action was not related to a purchase¹⁴. There is also a significant correlation between action and brand recall, although the nature of causation is unclear, as those who recall the brand may be more likely to act on related advertising.

Conclusion

Calls to action are a highly persuasive component of advertising. Calls to action within gambling advertisements are likely to have the greatest impact on consumers who are predisposed to gambling, have accounts with an operator, and have difficulty controlling their gambling. The harm potentially related to calls to action for betting is proportional to the immediacy upon which these can be engaged with.

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¹¹ Leppaniemi and Karjaluoto, "Factors Influencing Consumers' Willingness to Accept Mobile Advertising."

¹² Rettie, "Text Message Advertising: Response Rates and Branding Effects."

¹³ Cummings and Venkatesan, "Cognitive Dissonance and Consumer Behavior."

¹⁴ Rettie, "Text Message Advertising: Response Rates and Branding Effects."

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