

# Executive summary: Improving safer gambling messaging on operator advertising

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## 1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings from a research project to explore and test potential improvements to safer gambling messaging that are used on gambling adverts. This document provides an executive summary of the research findings; the full results are available in the accompanying research report.

## 2. About the authors

This project was a multidisciplinary collaboration consisting of qualitative research conducted by specialist communications agency The Outsiders, and quantitative research conducted by global survey experts YouGov. The research was supported by expert consultants from the Behavioural Insights Team and the University of Bristol, and was peer reviewed by a leading independent academic with subject matter expertise. The full project team is:

- YouGov
  - Kate Gosschalk (Associate Director)
  - Conor Cotton (Research Manager)
  - Briony Gunstone (Research Director)
- The Outsiders
  - Steven Lacey (Founder)
  - Annabelle Phillips (Founder of AP research)
- University of Bristol
  - Dr Raffaello Rossi (Lecturer in Marketing)
- Behavioural Insights Team
  - Dr Abi Mottershaw (Head of Online Research & Innovation)

Whilst GambleAware funded the research, the research was carried out independently. All findings and views expressed are those of the authors, and GambleAware did not determine or influence the results or findings.

### 3. Research rationale

With the gambling industry spending an approximated £1.5 billion each year on marketing,<sup>1</sup> it is important to leverage the messaging on gambling adverts to make the environment safer. This can be achieved by being clearer about the risks involved in gambling, and more clearly signposting GambleAware as a source of advice, tools and support.

The Gambling Commission's [Licence Conditions and Codes of Practice](#) (LCCP) requires all marketing of gambling products and services to be undertaken in a 'socially responsible manner'. In particular, Licensees must comply with the advertising codes of practice issued by the [Committee of Advertising Practice](#) (CAP) for non-broadcast advertisements and the [Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice](#) (BCAP).

The Gambling Commission requires Licensees to follow any relevant industry code on advertising, notably the Industry Group for Responsible Gambling (IGRG) [code for Socially Responsible Advertising](#). These guidelines are created by representatives from gambling companies and coordinated by the Betting and Gaming Council. These set out 'good practice' but do not have the status of operator licence conditions.

The IGRG code includes the specific requirement to include GambleAware or gambleaware.org in advertising of gambling products and services. The latest code also includes a requirement for most operators to direct 20% of all eligible advertising (broadcast and digital) to safer gambling messaging.

GambleAware has long recognised that there is a need to assess and optimise the way in which industry operators use GambleAware's assets in their adverts, particularly where there is a lack of consistency and visibility, or outdated brand usage. It is also necessary to identify, assess and address any potential issues arising from the GambleAware brand being placed alongside industry-owned safer gambling straplines such as '[Take Time To Think](#)' (TTTT). These issues include multiple call to actions being placed on adverts, and the incorrect assumption that GambleAware owns the TTTT messaging.

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<sup>1</sup> GambleAware, *Gambling advertising and marketing spend in Great Britain, 2014-17*. Available [here](#).

GambleAware’s campaign development research indicated a need for messaging on operator adverts which shifts perceptions away from the idea that gambling is a 'harmless bit of fun' towards the idea that 'gambling can lead to harm among anyone'.<sup>2</sup> This type of messaging shifts both societal perceptions and encourages behaviour change by giving people a reason to self-appraise. This mirrors wider academic research that suggests harms-based messaging has more of an impact on people’s gambling-related beliefs and intentions<sup>3</sup> alongside a general need to move away from messages that only focus on self-appraisal / promote the concept of “responsible gambling”.<sup>4</sup>

With this in mind, this research set out to be one of the first research studies to measure the impact and effectiveness of a number of potential alternative forms of safer gambling messaging on gambling advertising within a GB context, and comparing them against the current industry-led TTTT strapline.

## 4. Research methodology

### *Phase 1: Background research*

The background research (phase 1) was conducted to understand the problem that needed to be solved, learn from best practice, and shape a programme of research within a GB context that could help solve the identified problems. This included:

- Desk-based research looked at key materials relevant to this project (e.g. legal requirements of operators, current usage of the GambleAware brand on operator adverts, academic papers on the topic).
- Data was synthesised from GambleAware’s Annual Brand Tracking online survey conducted by YouGov (among a sample of over 3,000 members of the GB public, fieldwork conducted between 27 Feb – 10 Mar 2023).

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<sup>2</sup> *Prevention campaign strategic testing December 2023*. Conducted by Define. Not publicly accessible.

<sup>3</sup> De Jans, S., Cauberghe, V., Hudders, L., & Rys, F. (2023). An experimental study to examine whether and how Flemish and Dutch harm prevention messages on gambling advertising affect consumers’ gambling-related beliefs and intentions. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 37(6), 771–784. Available [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> Rintoul A, Marionneau V, Livingstone C, Nikkinen J and Kipsaina C (2023) Editorial: Gambling, stigma, suicidality, and the internalization of the ‘responsible gambling’ mantra. *Front. Psychiatry* 14:1214531. Available [here](#).

## *Phase 2: Qualitative research*

The qualitative testing aimed to explore messages that resonated and why, and to streamline messages for phase 3. This phase was conducted by The Outsiders via 1 hour online interviews between 27 September and 6 October 2023. Research was conducted with 53 people through small focus groups and in-depth interviews, with a wide range of experiences from non-gamblers to those experiencing problems.

## *Phase 3: Quantitative research*

The quantitative testing aimed to test the strongest recommendations from the qualitative research at scale. This phase was an online, nationally representative survey of over 7,000 people in GB, conducted by YouGov (fieldwork between 10 November and 22 November 2023). This included three studies:

1. A randomised control trial to measure the impact<sup>5</sup> of the current industry-led strapline (TTTT) alongside potential alternatives
2. A conjoint analysis<sup>6</sup> exploring the optimal positioning and design of the GambleAware logo and messaging
3. A/B testing of the current industry-led video endframe (TTTT) compared to an alternative

Results were reported among the general population, those who had gambled in the last 12 months, and those who gamble with a PGSI score of 1+.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The performance of these changes to safer gambling advertising was measured based on a number of key metrics, including their impact on advert cut-through, perceived impact and memorability, deposit limit behaviours and likelihood to search GambleAware.

<sup>6</sup> Conjoint analysis is used in brand and communications research to understand the relationship between a number of different factors and how that impacts an outcome (e.g. getting people to search for GambleAware). In this research this was the type of advert, message, logo position and the inclusion of a graphic separator.

<sup>7</sup> The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) is a screening tool used to measure the prevalence of 'problem gambling' in the population. A score of PGSI 1+ indicates that a person is experiencing any level of problems with gambling, whilst a PGSI score of 8+ indicates an individual is experiencing 'problem gambling'. More information is available [here](#).



## 5. Key findings

### 5.1. Phase 1: Background research

#### *GambleAware signposting on operator adverts*

- It has previously been shown that the GambleAware logo on operator adverts tends to receive quite limited attention: AI eye-tracking software found the relative attention for the GambleAware logo to be in the range of 0%-9% and often below 5%. The minimum relative attention required for achieving cut-through is 5% - in other words, at least 5% of the viewer's attention should focus on the GambleAware logo.<sup>8</sup>
- This is corroborated by the fact that public awareness of the GambleAware brand on gambling adverts is low, with just 28% of the public reporting to have seen the logo on gambling ads.<sup>8</sup>
- There are both positives and negatives of having the GambleAware brand included in operator adverts. Positives include raising awareness of GambleAware (59% of the public agree) and of gambling harms (50% agree), and driving traffic to the website, while negatives include the risk of some people mistakenly thinking that GambleAware is controlled by the industry (26% agree) or that GambleAware is endorsing those adverts (25% agree).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the positives can be said to outweigh the negatives, in the sense that more people agree with the positive aspects than the negative aspects.

#### *'When The Fun Stops Stop' Messaging*

- GambleAware was often mistakenly cited as being responsible for the 'When The Fun Stops Stop' (WTFSS) strapline, with 58% of the general public incorrectly attributing this message to GambleAware.<sup>9</sup> This has also happened, albeit to a lesser extent, with TTTT: 13% of the general public incorrectly attribute this message to GambleAware.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> GambleAware's 2023 Annual Brand Tracking survey (including bespoke AI eye tracking): Conducted by YouGov.

<sup>9</sup> GambleAware's 2022 Annual Brand Tracking survey: Conducted by YouGov

- Having both TTTT and BeGambleAware on adverts can cause confusion for the public.
  - Among those experiencing any level of problems from their gambling (PGSI 1+), almost half (48%) would not know whether to go to the TTTT or GambleAware website first for advice, tools and support.
- Wider academic research has suggested a lack of effectiveness of TTTT in encouraging people to take action<sup>10</sup>. Experts have highlighted the importance of a pool of messages rather than just one<sup>11</sup>, with other jurisdictions like Australia utilising multiple messages on rotation to mitigate message fatigue<sup>12</sup>.

## **5.2. Phases 2 and 3: Primary qualitative and quantitative research**

### *GambleAware signposting on operator adverts*

- There is currently a lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the GambleAware logo on gambling operator advertising. Adding a short message or call to action (CTA) next to the GambleAware logo would provide consumers with a clear and instant indication of the help and support they will get there.
- Updating the GambleAware logo format in order to add straplines such as *'Worried? Search GambleAware'* or *'GambleAware. Advice. Tools. Support'* was shown to have a positive impact on likelihood to search for GambleAware.
- The GambleAware logo and safer gambling message are less likely to be noticed when included on the actual advert, suggesting that it is better located within a wider 'safer gambling' band that sits outside of the actual content of the advert.

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<sup>10</sup> Newall PWS, Hayes T, Singmann H, Weiss-Cohen L, Ludvig EA, Walasek L. Evaluation of the 'take time to think' safer gambling message: a randomised, online experimental study. *Behavioural Public Policy*. 2023:1-18. Available [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> Newall, P. W. S., Rockloff, M., Hing, N., Browne, M., Thorne, H., Russell, A. M. T., & Armstrong, T. (2023). How do academics, regulators, and treatment providers think that safer gambling messages can be improved? *Addiction Research & Theory*, 31(4), 278–287. Available [here](#).

<sup>12</sup> Attorney-General's Department, Government of South Australia, *Gambling Administration Guidelines. Authorised Betting Operations Act 2000*. Available [here](#).



- The use of a band as a visual aid clarifies that the safer gambling message is from GambleAware and not the operator. This in turn amplifies the authenticity of the message. Some people may assume that if the message is from the operator, it was placed under obligation and therefore does not necessarily come with support.
- When thinking about likelihood to search for GambleAware, the top left is the preferred position for the GambleAware logo among the general public, all who gamble, and all with a PGSI score of 1+.
- Among these audiences, there is a preference for the safer gambling band on adverts to be one colour, as opposed to having separate GambleAware and TTTT sections. However, since association between GambleAware and TTTT is also undesirable, this suggests the need to replace the TTTT strapline with an alternative message.
- Overall, the findings suggest that replacing the GambleAware logo with *'Worried? Search GambleAware'* in a top-left location would make people more likely to search for support at GambleAware, receiving a preference share of 74%. This compares to a preference share of 26% for the current approach.
- These results were quite consistent across the three audience subgroups (those in the general population, all who gamble, and all with a PGSI score of 1+), indicating that these changes are likely to be effective across a range of target audiences.

### *'Take Time to Think' (TTTT) messaging*

The qualitative research showed that the TTTT message was the one that resonated least with the target audience. It was felt to be too generic and does not necessarily relate to gambling. Findings from the testing of alternative potential straplines showed that messaging needs to be non-judgmental and must avoid blanket statements that do not resonate with people's own experiences of gambling, otherwise they are likely to simply be dismissed by the target audience.

Those who experience harms are more likely to reflect on their own gambling behaviour when presented with messaging which highlights the harms caused by gambling empathetically, such as *'Gambling can grip anyone'* and *'GambleAware can help'*. Messaging such as *'Gambling comes at a cost'* and *'Gambling can grip anyone'* were both

felt to be more effective at encouraging self-appraisal and making people think differently about gambling, while also hitting the right tone.

A summary of the key results from the quantitative phase is shown below, demonstrating which messages performed more strongly than TTTT across a range of audiences (i.e., among the general public, rather than just those who gamble and/or experience problems as a result of their gambling).

**Table 1. Effectiveness of alternative potential messages compared to TTTT**

Metric (full questions below)	Gambling comes at a cost	Gambling can grip anyone	Gambling can be addictive	Gambling. Know the harm	Worried about gambling? Search GA for AST
<i>Better message cut-through (% recognising message)</i>	P G 1+	P G 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	G	G
<i>More impactful (% more impactful)</i>	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	
<i>More memorable (% agree memorable)</i>	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u>	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	G
<i>Challenges perceptions of gambling (% disagree gambling is harmless fun)</i>	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+
<i>More setting deposit limit (% setting limit in behavioural trial)</i>	P G 1+	P G 1+	G 1+	<u>P</u> <u>G</u> 1+	G 1+

Note: Letters in the table indicate the audiences for which each message outperformed TTTT (underlined = statistically significant difference)

P = General public

G = Those who gamble

1+ = Those scoring 1+ on the PGSI

Three messages stood out within the quantitative phase of research, particularly when compared to TTTT:

1. ‘*Gambling comes at a cost*’, which was seen as more impactful<sup>13</sup> among people who gamble (22% reported this vs. 12% for TTTT). This was also more likely to be seen as memorable (32% reported this vs. 24% for TTTT).
2. ‘*Gambling can be addictive*’, which had high recall among people who gamble (46% reported this vs. 35% for TTTT). This message also had the strongest impact on the setting of lower deposit limits: 41% set a limit of below £5 after seeing this message, compared to 32% after seeing the TTTT message.

<sup>13</sup> Impact was measured by asking respondents whether a given message was more or less impactful compared to other safer gambling messages they had seen on gambling adverts

3. '*Gambling can grip anyone*' also performed well across various metrics. This message was among the top performers in terms of the proportion reporting that it made them feel that gambling is addictive, for example.

All of these messages were found to be significantly stronger at communicating the potential harms of gambling, which is a critical part of shifting societal perceptions away from the idea of gambling being “harmless” fun, and as a result enabling greater self-appraisal as well as reduced stigma. For example, the perceptions that “gambling is addictive” and “anyone can become addicted to gambling” were significantly more likely to be taken out of the messaging '*Gambling can grip anyone*' (64%) and '*Gambling can be addictive*' (61%) compared to TTTT (6%). Similarly, these messages were significantly more likely than TTTT to challenge perceptions of gambling, with disagreement higher for thinking gambling is harmless fun (54%-57% across the three messages compared to 47% for TTTT)

Other results showed that:

- A separate band is an important mechanism to make a clear distinction between the safer gambling messaging and the operator advert, which therefore increases the perceived credibility of the messaging. However, after the first exposure there were minimal shifts in perceptions, suggesting that making the band bigger could draw more attention to the message.
- The GambleAware safer gambling clip at the end of a 30-second gambling advert was more effective than the TTTT version at showing people where to get support (72% vs. 30% agree) alongside being seen as empathetic and effective at getting the message across.

## 6. Recommendations

### *Alternatives to Take Time to Think*

There are potential improvements to the current industry-created safer gambling messaging slogan (TTTT):

- **Messaging:** There is evidence to suggest that, from a harm prevention and reduction perspective, the TTTT messaging should be replaced with the following messages on rotation:
  1. Gambling comes at a cost
  2. Gambling can be addictive
  3. Gambling can grip anyone
- **Sizing:** The band could be made larger to draw more attention to the message and placed at the top of adverts to help cut-through.

### *GambleAware signposting on operator adverts*

There are potential improvements when signposting to GambleAware on gambling adverts:

- **Messaging:** A short message added alongside the GambleAware logo helps to better demonstrate their role, such as:
  1. GambleAware. Advice. Tools. Support
  2. Worried? Search GambleAware
- **Positioning:** The GambleAware logo should only be included within a wider safer gambling band, with the logo located in the top left of adverts.

### *Safer gambling messaging on video adverts*

There are potential improvements to safer gambling messages shown at the end of video adverts in the following areas:

- **Length:** Increasing the length of the safer gambling message at the end of the video.
- **Audio:** Including a voiceover whilst the safer gambling message is on screen.
- **Messaging:** Using content similar to that used within the GambleAware version (e.g. empathetic, signposting to support).

## Overarching recommendations

Overall, the findings suggest a need for clearer guidelines around safer gambling messaging on operator adverts. The below shows an example image based on the above recommendations. However, further work is needed to develop detailed guidelines for industry operators; these guidelines will be produced and published by GambleAware in 2024. The below image is therefore subject to change as the guidelines are developed based on continued stakeholder engagement.



## 7. Opportunities for future research

- For future experiments researchers could consider including repeated exposure to explore message impact over time.
- If a similar experiment to the deposit limit were to be used again, this might be more effective placed after the second exposure (i.e. after respondents' attention is specifically called to the banners instead of after seeing the banner within a busy advert).
- Messages could be tested in-play (e.g. the message as a banner while participants play a slot machine simulation) to get closer to a more interactive / realistic environment, however it is important to consider where this messaging will be used (predominantly on marketing on TV / social media etc. which is outside of the gambling environment).

- If conducting a similar study in the future, researchers could consider asking the same questions pre- and post-exposure to measure any uplift (although this does have the potential to prime / bias respondents seeing stimulus). It could also be useful to measure claimed action-taking as a result of seeing the safer gambling adverts (e.g. impact on gambling urges, intention to reduce / stop gambling).
- The research did not confirm whether more people associated GambleAware with TTTT if a separator was included or not. Future research could test this using a split sample approach.
- Future research could further explore the colour of the banner, as well as its size and potentially other visual factors.
- National Lottery adverts are an interesting area of focus for future research, since they are not legally obliged to carry the GambleAware logo.
- This research focuses on specific set of alternative messages, but that is not all possible forms of messaging and there may be others that were not the focus of this project. Other straplines not considered here could be the subject of further research using similar methods.

## 8. Methodological considerations

- One potential limitation of the qualitative testing is that it asked participants to review and consider messaging in a way that was different to how they might come across it in their everyday lives. A number of mitigations were employed, including: rotating the range of stimulus; not giving too much time to each piece of stimulus but seeking top-of-mind reactions, and having small group (e.g. four people) to allow for instant reactions and reduce the chance of 'groupthink'. Despite these measures, it may always be inevitable that the research environment does not exactly replicate the real environment in which adverts might be seen.
- The first exposure to the gambling advert with the safer gambling banner did not, in and of itself, shift audience perceptions. It was necessary to ask respondents to look specifically at the banners before shifts in perceptions could be seen.



- Causal effects of how different forms of marketing affect behaviour are challenging to measure. This research attempted to mimic a real life setting by using a deposit limit question, but other methods could also prove useful.
- Given the same respondents were exposed to different types of stimulus materials, and asked questions about those, this may have had an impact on their responses to the other materials. Future research could use different respondents for different experiments, as opposed to combining them within one project.

For more information please see the full report published on the GambleAware website.

If you have any questions on this research, please direct them to one (or all) of the following:

[kate.gosschalk@yougov.com](mailto:kate.gosschalk@yougov.com) or [conor.cotton@yougov.com](mailto:conor.cotton@yougov.com) (Quantitative – YouGov)

[steve@slsstrategy.com](mailto:steve@slsstrategy.com) or [annabelle@ap-research.co.uk](mailto:annabelle@ap-research.co.uk) (Qualitative – The Outsiders)

[research@gambleaware.org](mailto:research@gambleaware.org) (Commissioner – GambleAware)