



How gambling is promoted to women

How marketing and public relations strategies shape women's gambling

This study explored how gambling promotions and public relations strategies influence women's attitudes and behaviours. This survey included 525 women aged 18–40 years living in Victoria, Australia. Participants shared their views about novel gambling promotions that appeared in social media posts from gambling companies.

Key findings

Gambling is made to feel normal

- Promotions were seen to make gambling feel more normal and socially acceptable for women
- High exposure and repeated messaging reinforced the idea that gambling is “something everyone does”
- Featuring women in promotions helped position gambling as a female activity

Gambling is presented as part of everyday life for women.

Designed to appeal to women

- Promotions align with women's interests, values, and social contexts
- Use of influencers and celebrities makes gambling feel relatable and desirable
- Events and markets are framed to feel more relevant for women to gambling on

This includes reality TV and pop culture betting, lifestyle framing and female friendly branding

Increasing risk of harm

- Women were concerned these strategies:
 - Draw women into gambling
 - Normalise ongoing engagement
 - Increase vulnerability to harm
- Some described gambling as a “slippery slope”
- Promotions may lead to:
 - Financial harm
 - Addiction
 - Long-term negative impacts

What looks harmless can lead to harm over time.

Gambling is framed as fun and harmless

- Promotions present gambling as:
 - Light-hearted
 - Entertaining
 - Social
- This framing can reduce perceptions of risk
- Gambling is positioned as a low-stakes activity, even when it is not

Risk is downplayed through positive and social messaging.

Encourages new participation

- Promotions were seen to encourage women to try gambling, including those who previously wouldn't
- Influencers and celebrities act as powerful entry points to gambling
- Novel betting markets create a sense of confidence and familiarity

Women described these strategies as: encouraging, attracting, persuading, tempting.

Corporate social responsibility strategies builds trust

- Gambling companies:
 - Sponsor and endorse women's sport
 - Promote gender equity initiatives
 - Align themselves with women's health causes
- These strategies were seen as:
 - Improving brand image
 - Building trust
 - Masking harm

Women described these as: “marketing tactics” and attempts to appear “caring” or “responsible”.

Key insight

Gambling is being actively reshaped to appeal to women. These strategies make gambling feel normal.

Why this matters

- ✓ Gambling marketing is actively shaping women's attitudes and behaviours.
- ✓ Strategies are designed to attract new female audiences
- ✓ Risk is often hidden behind messages of fun, empowerment, and social connection
- ✓ Current approaches may underestimate how these strategies influence harm



BASED ON: McCarthy, S., Pitt, H., Arnot, G. and Thomas, S.L., 2026. “They make it seem harmless”: a qualitative investigation into women's perceptions about novel gambling promotions and public relations strategies. *BMC Public Health*.