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Top podcasters run gambling ads that can reach kids, report says

A report from the Campaign for Accountability named 44 of the top 100 YouTube podcasts across genres that ran host-read gambling ads – the kind that play for listeners of any age.

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— Top podcasters are sharing gambling ads that could be consumed by kids, according to a report.

Justine Goode / NBC News; Getty Images

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By David Ingram

Nearly half of the top podcasts on YouTube have been running ads for gambling and sports betting apps that could reach teens, helping to fuel the nation's betting craze and testing the limits of YouTube's policies to shield minors from gambling content, according to a report Wednesday from the Campaign for Accountability, a watchdog organization that investigates the tech industry.

The report found that 44 of the top 100 podcasts on YouTube had at least one gambling or sports betting ad read by a host during the previous year – a type of ad that anyone can hear regardless of age. The ads appeared in a wide array of podcast categories, including shows devoted to comedy, pop culture and sports.

Of the top 20 podcasts, those running the ads included hits such as comedy show Kill Tony, politics-themed MeidasTouch, The Joe Rogan Experience, The Pat McAfee Show, Nightcap and This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von. The shows did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Tuesday, ahead of the report's release.

The podcast ads are part of a larger national trend of gambling content becoming far more commonplace in media of all kinds in recent years, with TV commercials about gambling [seemingly taking over](#) some live sports broadcasts despite potential harm to underage viewers.

The report also found a high prevalence of gambling or sports betting ads on Spotify, which is the second most popular app for listening to podcasts, after YouTube. On Spotify, 40 of the top 50 sports podcasts promoted at least one such sponsor and 20 of the top 50 comedy podcasts did so, according to the report. Top sports podcasts on the platform that promoted gambling included Pardon My Take, The Bill Simmons Podcast, the Fantasy Footballers, and New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce.

On YouTube, at least some of the ads appear to have violated [YouTube's policies](#), which say that content promoting online casino apps – but not online sports betting – may be age-restricted, according to the Campaign for Accountability. The researchers say they viewed the ads without being logged in, meaning the videos they appeared in were not age-restricted.

“While platforms like YouTube have specific advertising policies designed to prevent minors from seeing programmatic gambling ads, gambling ads integrated into episode content are nevertheless accessible to children of any age on YouTube, even those not signed in to an account,” the report says.

YouTube, which is owned by Google, said it would review the findings.

“We are committed to the rigorous enforcement of our gambling policies to ensure a safer experience for our younger viewers. We will closely review the content in the report and take appropriate action,” the company said in a statement.

Joe Maloney, president of the Sports Betting Alliance, a trade organization, defended the podcast ads, saying, “they’re all adult programs” and not geared toward minors or underage populations.

“And if there was a podcast on that was primarily serving children or teens, our members wouldn’t advertise on it. Period. Full stop,” he wrote in an email. He said alliance members – which includes DraftKings – commit not to advertise to audiences where the known percentage of audience members is reasonably believed to be at least 73% above the age of 21.

The legal landscape around online gambling and the associated advertising has been shifting radically since 2018, when the Supreme Court [cleared the way](#) for states to legalize sports betting. Now, 39 states [allow sports betting](#), and prediction markets such as Kalshi [offer a workaround](#) in states that don’t allow sports betting. Restrictions on ads [vary by state](#), but largely focus on preventing “false and deceptive” ads and including disclosure.

Like other media companies, YouTube has wrestled for years with how to handle gambling content as betting has become more commonplace in American society. Last year, YouTube [banned verbal references](#) to gambling sites unless Google first certified the site as meeting legal requirements. It also announced age restrictions on “depictions or promotions” of online gambling, saying it wanted to “protect viewers from potentially harmful content.”

In the announcement last year, YouTube appeared to use a narrow definition of gambling: It excluded online sports betting from age restrictions despite the fact that sports betting is [widely considered](#) to be a form of gambling. The company hasn’t said why.

Most of the gambling ads found by the Campaign for Accountability on YouTube podcasts were for sports-betting sites such as DraftKings and PrizePicks. Three of the podcasts ran ads for online casino apps: one for the Golden Nugget Casino and two for Hard Rock Bet. Those advertisers did not respond to requests for comment.

Michael Clauw, the communications director for the Campaign for Accountability, said YouTube should explain more clearly what kinds of gambling ads it allows and then enforce those policies.

“YouTube may be the most common place where gambling ads are encountered,” he said.

The latest report zeroed in on one type of podcast ad: the kind that a host reads aloud as part of an episode. Those ads are significant because they are not microtargeted to exclude minors, meaning that all listeners can hear them regardless of age, unlike the pre-video or mid-video ads that YouTube inserts into a video. The host-read ads are also something that's within the control of individual podcasters.

Podcasts were more likely to include host-read gambling ads if they were hosted primarily by men, about sports or hosted by male stand-up comedians, according to the report. The report notes that a handful of podcast hosts say they are souring on gambling ads after having previously agreed to read them, although it's not clear how widespread that sentiment is among hosts.

The report echoes the results of a [survey last year](#) by Common Sense Media, a different watchdog organization, finding that adolescent boys were more likely to see gambling ads on YouTube than anywhere else. In that survey, 61% of boys ages 11 to 17 reported seeing them on YouTube, compared to 60% who saw them on social media and 57% on TV sports broadcasts.

Some surveys say that underage gambling [is now widespread](#), driven by a combination of advertising, government deregulation, media encouragement and online platforms where the age and banking requirements are relatively easy to circumvent.

Clauw said that his organization decided to dig into YouTube's ads because it's where teens spend a lot of their time. About 73% of teens say [they watch YouTube daily](#), according to the Pew Research Center, a nonprofit survey organization.

YouTube is also where young people are most likely to listen to podcasts, beating out rival apps Spotify and Apple Podcasts as the podcast platform of choice for those ages 13 to 29, according to [survey firm Edison Research](#).

Spotify's [advertising policies](#) say that the company restricts the promotion of gambling and gambling-related ads, but may permit gambling-related ad content in certain instances such as online casinos, sports betting or other websites that facilitate gambling content. A company spokesperson declined to comment on how Spotify thinks about host-read gambling ads.

Apple's [guidelines](#) for podcast content do not mention gambling and include one sentence about advertising, saying that all ads "must be in compliance with applicable law." Apple did not respond to a request for comment.

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