

“If Only I Knew”

**A Lived Experience,
Place-Based Approach
to Communicating the
Commercial Drivers
of Gambling Harm**

OVERVIEW

“If Only I Knew” was a social media campaign implemented to raise awareness of gambling harm across Liverpool in early 2026. The campaign was targeted at young men, aged between 18 and 35. Commissioned by a public health team based at Liverpool City Council, the campaign was developed and implemented by Chapter One – a Lived Experience (LE)-led organisation. It aimed to raise awareness of the risks of commercial gambling and support options.

“Gambling harm is a public health issue that affects people, families and communities across Liverpool. This new campaign is tackling the root causes of gambling harm by focusing on the commercial determinants of health, as well as showing hope by involving people with LE. Our goal is for this campaign to reduce stigma and empower young people in the city to live healthier and happier lives.”
– **Professor Mathew Ashton, Director of Public Health, Liverpool City Council**

Social media impact analysis and a rapid, qualitative evaluation (conducted by London South Bank University¹) indicate that the campaign was impactful, engaging, and acceptable to its target audience. It achieved substantial reach (3.27 million total views) and meaningful engagement, including high volumes of shares (1684), saves (673), likes (7,386), and new online followers (776) of Chapter One. A total of 10 people reached out for help and were signposted to support services.

Young adults strongly supported the focus on harmful product design and manipulative tactics. Participants said this could prompt interest, reflection, and a more empathetic view of people who encounter harm. Relatable LE narratives and place-based imagery grounded messaging in the everyday contexts of young adults’ lives. However, participants identified limitations to engaging young adults via social media. Some young adults suggested social media delivery might be combined with a physical campaign to maximise the potential for impact.

“I remember he was an Irish lad, and that struck me at first, but it was also the way it was done. You could tell it was a human video rather than just kind of running off script ... A lot of what you see on social media is either fake or its kind of out of reach. Seeing more human stories definitely adds a kind of element of intrigue. And then on top of that, stories you can relate to, and also from someone who sounds similar to where you’re from.”
– **Young adult**

¹ Contact James Grimes (Director of Chapter One) for the full reports and more details on funding, methods, and findings: james@chapter-one.org

REACH & VISIBILITY & AWARENESS

The campaign exceeded expectations, achieving visibility and reach among the target population. The social media impact analysis revealed:

- 3.27 million total views and up to 1.37 million accounts reached
- Strong efficiency: 74,400 accounts per £1,000 spend

Qualitative insight: social media was seen by young adults as a necessary and appropriate channel for engaging their peer group. However, they also recognised limitations to social media delivery, including rapid scrolling, limited attention spans, and pervasive online gambling marketing. Many participants were worried about friends' gambling, which shaped their positive appraisals of the campaign.

"The way it can take over people's lives is like pretty mad to me ... A lot of my mates are like bang into gambling ... I watch a lot of football myself, and you'll sit there with your mates and they're just on their phones just gambling ... You're just sitting there like, you almost don't understand ... "How are they ... getting enjoyment out of that?" – **Young adult**

ENGAGEMENT & IMPACT

The campaign generated substantial engagement, with many saves, shares and likes throughout the campaign. Profile visits, new followers, and direct help-seeking messages all indicate engagement that moves beyond passive awareness.

- Content pieces saved 673 times, shared 1,684 times, and liked 7,386 times
- 49,063 profile visits (indicator of curiosity and intent)
- 776 new followers (ongoing engagement) · Ten direct help-seeking messages including disclosures of gambling problems and requests for help

Qualitative insight: young adults said that the campaign helped them understand the risks of commercial gambling and provided access to support options. They also felt that the campaign could help address stigma, with potential to encourage conversations and disclosure among those who are encountering gambling harm.

"I didn't understand ... [until] it was said that, like, gambling companies just want to make as much money as possible. They don't want anyone to win. So, when they explained that, something clicked Now, I actually really understand like the gambling companies, what they're trying to do and how like they're trying to get you hooked." – **Young adult**

"It's not just [that it] helps other people kind of empathise with him, but also it kind of talks to people who might be going through it themselves and says, "You should, like, not feel bad about speaking out about it. Don't feel like you're a failure and that you can't come forward about it." – **Young adult**

MECHANISMS OF IMPACT

Framing harm: recognising the role and responsibility of the gambling industry

Young adults strongly supported “If Only I Knew’s” strong commercial determinants frame, finding it thought-provoking and credible. The focus on describing the industry’s profit motive and debunking free bets was identified as particularly impactful, including among participants who gambled. The social media analysis revealed strong online engagement with such “industry truth” content (e.g., high saves, shares, profile visits).

“You’ve got probably the one thing that is going to grab people’s attention most: how the companies are messing about, so that’s dismantling that whole belief in the free-betting sort of side-industry. That ... [is] how many people I know got into it ... [and] is what I believed ... [There’s a] false sense of security you get from the free bets ... [and] from thinking you’re cheating the system if you try and play them right.” – **Young adult**

Relatable LE:

“If Only I Knew” featured varied LE narratives, including bereavement content (which drove the highest shares), alongside content about gambling’s “everyday harms” – e.g., such as being preoccupied with one’s phone, losing time, or feeling less present. This variation facilitated engagement with diverse audiences. Positive stories of the mental health gains of life without gambling resonated with young adults’ concerns and values.

“I like the fact that it brings in that his mental health has improved and he’s spending more time with his family and friends ... That’s definitely something that will stick in younger people’s minds more ... It’s something our generation really cares about.” – **Young adult**

“I think [the point about] being “less absorbed by the products” is really good. People don’t really realise it, it’s become their norm, just as like everyone scrolling on TikTok has become the norm. For them, gambling on their phone every day, like spending time and money and effort on it, and spending less time with family and friends, that’s the norm. So maybe they’ve like forgotten like what life used to be like, and maybe this ... [is] a wake-up call.” – **Young adult**

Place as an anchor for relevance and recognition

Young adults highlighted the importance of place-based features. For some, recognisable local places and everyday routines sparked initial interest, while for others it demonstrated that conversations about gambling’s risks and harms are relevant locally. Participants often focused more on visual context than on accent or voice delivery.

“I recognised the train. I’d ridden the same Merseyrail train in Liverpool before ... I was like, “Oh, I know that train.” But then obviously the message came through that he was talking about gambling addiction and how serious it can get ... Maybe if it was just any other train, I would have scrolled past. But because I noticed what train it was, I paid attention to it.” – **Young adult**

CHALLENGES

- **Differential responses:** Messages may resonate differently across audiences. E.g., LE recovery stories appear most effective for those experiencing harm but may have less relevance as a means of engaging broader young adult audiences.
- **Platform constraints:** Social media shapes how messages are encountered and processed, creating trade-offs between reach and depth of engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Sustain and scale LE-led content**

Continue commissioning LE narratives in efforts to raise awareness of gambling harm. Evaluation findings indicate that carefully tailoring such narratives can avoid the unintended consequences that LE stories of extreme harm can generate.

- **Maintain and strengthen the commercial determinants framing**

Continue to foreground how gambling harms are shaped by industry design and practices. This framing has potential to enhance credibility, support reflection, and reduce stigma. It should remain a central organising principle across campaign content.

- **Develop LE-led universal messaging**

Explore content on the broader ethical dimensions of the gambling industry's business model, such as the concentration of betting outlets in deprived areas (i.e., community harms), or its political influence. This may support wider public engagement.

- **Adopt a differentiated content strategy**

Retain and further develop a mix of content types (e.g., everyday harms, recovery narratives, more severe harms, community harms, political corruption) to engage different audience groups. No single narrative will resonate equally.

- **Enhance relatability through people, place and context**

Continue to use familiar environments, social roles, and everyday experiences to ground messages. However, ensure that visual elements are clearly relevant to gambling to avoid distraction or perceived mismatch.

- **Extend beyond social media to deepen engagement**

Complement social media activity with delivery in physical and social settings (e.g., universities, community spaces), where messages can prompt discussion and reflection. This may help overcome the limitations of digital platforms.

INFORMATION ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

Chapter One conducted the social media analysis between Dec 2025 and March 2026. A rapid, qualitative evaluation conducted by a public health research team at London South Bank University explored perceptions of acceptability, relevance, and impact among 16 Liverpool-based university students. See full reports for more details

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