



Online bingo websites use a range of strategies to draw in new users, foster emotional attachment and encourage heavier involvement in gambling

**online bingo
marketing
gambling
belonging
excessive use**

We analysed the features, content, messages and imagery of online bingo websites popular in the UK. Websites had a number of features which helped to draw in the first time user: easy to access, with minimal age-verification procedures, and it was possible to play and win for ‘free’ even before entering credit card details. Textual and design elements evoked the thrill of playing and winning, while at the same time presenting a reassuring image of bingo as normal, widespread and everyday. Images, graphic design and references were strongly female-oriented and also unsophisticated, suggesting a child-like, playful and benign activity.

Belonging was a major theme in the sites. Language was inviting and inclusive, with constant references to joining in, social interaction, community and friendship. ‘Chat’ and ‘Community’ pages offered the facility to chat with ‘chat hosts’ or ‘room hosts’ and other players during and between games. Mascots and other features were used to convey brand ‘personality’ and to build a relationship between brand and users. Features such as rewarding existing players to ‘recruit’ friends helped to draw in new customers, to cement users’ relationship with the site, and to knit bingo further into users’ everyday life.



Websites used a number of strategies to encourage users to step up their involvement. These included: offering a wide variety of games to prevent boredom, encouraging users to embed bingo into their daily routines, emphasising the ability to play frequently and continuously, evoking the ‘fear of missing out’, providing the ability to ‘play on the go’, encouraging other forms of gambling between games, and linking rewards to engagement, in particular by incentivising frequent play or high spend.

Our analysis suggests that bingo in its online form has the potential to lead to excessive use. Ongoing critical scrutiny is needed of the nature of online bingo marketing and its effects on users.

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Stead, M., Angus, K., Purves, R., Dobbie, F., Reith G.: *The Online Bingo Boom in the UK: A Qualitative Examination of its Appeal*. Article in preparation for submission to PLOS ONE.